







# A MAN IN THE STREET

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Class No.	G. 10.
Book No.	664



*'The web of our life is of a mingled yarn, good and  
ill together'*





*V. W. Garratt*

PENCIL SKETCH BY I. M. BRACEY, 1924

# A MAN IN THE STREET

by V. W. Garratt

Illustrated  
with eight pages of  
photographs



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To my Wife

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# Foreword

MILLIONS of common people pass through life without leaving any record of personal experience. Though autobiographies should not be written unless the authors have something interesting to tell, most memoirs flatter the people who have reached the temple of fame or who have excelled in the superficial life of the moneyed class. Apart from occasional exceptions, the mass of ordinary people, without privilege or distinguished position, lives through the daily round of triumph and defeat unnoticed and unremembered. And perhaps they are to blame for this; for by paying homage to the aristocracy of wealth they encourage the idea that only the 'princes and prelates and periwigged charioteers' are of importance, and that their own humble lives have no permanent value in the scheme of the universe. In recorded history the life of the common people scarcely exists, and just as the child's mind is filled with the 'lumbbersome lore' of the past, so the glamorous inanities that claim the adoration of the present age may garnish the school-books of the future to carry on the instruction of the young.

This fragment of autobiography has been written with no higher presumption than to describe an aspect of life as known to the common people. The inevitable use of the personal pronoun does not preclude the fact that in what is said is included the life experience of thousands of other ordinary people. I have not sought to emphasize personal achievement that would invest me with a false superiority over the people from whom I came; for I have long since learned that the conflict between individual and environment should keep one ever humble, no matter what the results. For that

reason I have not spared myself the pain of disclosing details which normally I am glad to forget. My effort has been to present a faithful picture of my first thirty years of life, with the hope that it may serve as a contribution to sociological literature from the ordinary man. Therefore in his praise shall the tale unfold.

1939

V. W. G.



## I. Childhood

Gather, then, each flower that grows,  
When the young heart overflows,  
To embalm that tent of snows.

LONGFELLOW.

My entry into life took place in the City of Birmingham on the 17th of February 1892, the coldest day of the year. I survived not because of any special arrangements for my arrival, but because Nature decided that I should add to the burden of my mother's growing family. I say burden because I have since learned of the dread with which she viewed her frequent periods of pregnancy. Like most working-class mothers she probably lacked the knowledge to interfere with too frequent conception, though an aunt confided to me in after years that she had desperately sought to make the attempt. She was a good-looking woman of Irish descent and I was the third of the nine children born to her before she had passed the age of thirty-six. And it all happened in a little back-to-back house of an ugly courtyard in a poor district of the Midland town.

My father was a glassblower by trade and worked in a small gloomy factory, which supplied hospitals with artificial human eyes and doll manufacturers with similar ornaments. He also made his own glass collar-studs, salt-spoons for the home, and dainty little glass animals that stood on the shelf over the fireplace. Small of stature, he nevertheless came of a wiry stock, for one of the 'sights' that entertained my early childhood was that of a tall, patriarchal, long-bearded old man who firmly planted a heavy stick on the pavement as he passed down the road. He was known as 'our grandfather,' but was never to be approached or spoken to, as

he and my father were bitter enemies and continued to be so until the patriarch passed to the grave when well over ninety years of age. He had spent his retirement in a small house at the farther end of our road.

The working-class houses of Birmingham have long been a subject of reproach of those early Victorian builders, who crowded as many as was possible upon each acre, regardless of appearance, comfort, or health. Many of them were built back-to-back, with entries that led into the courtyards of other houses, which split the roads up into small communities. The court in which we lived was a typical example; for a few yards from the house stood the communal water-tap, two wash-houses backed by a dust pit, into which, in those days, emptied the refuse of the two adjoining closets, and another string of houses hemmed in by the dividing wall of the next court.

In front of our window was an old hawthorn-tree that struggled to keep up its lustre of white bloom every spring. Whether it was a remnant of the pastoral life that had been swept away by the hands of the builders I cannot say, but the birds that twitted in the branches seemed to be holding high council about its solitude. As the sweet-smelling blossom came near the bedroom window, my brother and I often risked our lives in trying to reach it but were saved from a worse calamity than a good spanking by scared neighbours giving timely alarm. Throughout the summer the trunk of the tree was vigorously chalked to form a wicket as the boys of the court found it a splendid aid to the evening's game of cricket. Against the middle of the dividing wall stood a gas-lamp which spread a feeble light over the two courts, and one of my earliest impressions is that of the heavy clank of the lamplighter's feet hurrying up the entry, and of his return at dawn, when the extinction of the light also put out the dancing reflections on the bedroom walls. In gusty weather the light often blew out for the glass panes of the lamp were a

favourite target for the more unscrupulous batsmen. Neither could the windows of the two brew-houses boast of a single pane of glass. Dark and forbidding dungeons these buildings appeared to my childish fancy, for stray cats crept in and out of the open windows and fought among the tubs. So great a horror had I of passing those windows in the dark that I dreaded having to go to the closet and tried to delay the process as long as I could. As the whole courtyard was paved with brick it was possible to tell by the familiar footsteps who was going in or out without the drawing aside of curtains. Life could not be lived unto itself in those small communities.

Our own household was pressed into one small living-room, where we jostled each other with the restless abandon of children, while in the same atmosphere was done the cooking, the bathing, the eating, and the clothes-mending, to a never-ending din of voices. A perilous flight of stairs led to the bedroom overhead, and higher still was a low gloomy attic, crowned by chimney pots. The slated roof was seldom free from dislocations. Adjoining the living-room was a small dark pantry with a brick sink at one end and the cellar steps at the other. The cellar was the special preserve of my father, for it was his practice to store up in it a reserve supply of coal and keep a strict eye on the rate of consumption. The reserve was accumulated by the frequent journeyings made by us young children for penny and twopenny buckets' worth of the treasure, which, to my father's calculating mind, gave better value than to buy the coal in bulk. To avoid the observation of the neighbours, these journeys with the bucket were generally made in the dark.

Our furniture was of the simplest. A table, chairs (not by any means easy), a chiffonier, an old couch, and a well-used sewing-machine, were the chief articles of utility, while an oil-lamp was suspended from the ceiling. My mother's daily practice of cleaning and filling this



lamp was not the least of the domestic events I have never forgotten.

My parents' bedroom was equally simple. An iron bedstead, a table with detachable mirror, a small chair with a matted seat half torn out, and an old wooden box covered with wallpaper nearly filled the room. This wooden box had a mysterious air, for it was my father's property, not to be opened under pain of a good thrashing. Using the bedroom as a playground one wet day, my elder brother was tempted to open the box, pull out some contents and be caught in the act. After this, it was a loathsome thing even to look upon. The attic contained two large beds and an old hamper that stood under the window. How this hamper came to be in our house, I do not know; we suffered many thrashings through forcing one another into it, while the frightened occupant shrieked terror in the ears of my father downstairs. On one occasion my mother received a severe fright. Having sent my younger brother early to bed for some offence she came up to find the room empty and the window open. Her first impression was that he had fallen into the yard below, but lifting the lid of the basket she found him curled up, fast asleep.

My father was an inveterate gambler. Before he married he had a passion for backing horses, and as long as I remember his one absorbing interest in life was to risk his money in this way. What a mania it became. He dreamed horses, ate with them, drank with them, studied their daily form, gave them control over his thoughts, his money, and his home and children, until his whole aim and purpose in life was to hazard his wages on the turf.

There was little laughter and happiness in the home. My father's moods were governed by the fortunes of the racecourse; if he won a few shillings one day his apprehension of losing them the next was generally fulfilled.

I was sent out first thing in the morning for a number of racing newspapers, over which my father pored while having his breakfast. Then he carefully wrote down the names of the horses he had selected on a scrap of paper, in which he wrapped up the money, and gave me instructions to 'take it down' after I came out of school. 'Take it down' meant taking it to the bookie—'Birdie' as he was called—who daily took up a position at the entrance to a gully that intersected a street some distance away. Birdie was a stubby little man who looked more like a Methodist parson than a bookmaker. The practice of chasing these professional law-breakers compelled Birdie to keep a sharp look out for the police, and there was good reason therefore why he stood at one end of the gully with one eye peeping up and down the street while the other watched for a sign from a young accomplice who kept guard at the other end. And to put a bet into Birdie's hand required equal tact. To go straight up to him was the height of folly, for that would have played right into the hands of any disguised policeman. The correct method was to catch the alert eye of the bookie, stealthily slip the packet into his palm, and pass on as if the man never existed. Whether or not I should see him again that day depended on the result of the race. If my father won, I was sent to collect the winnings at a little public-house which was Birdie's nightly rendezvous. Pushing open the swing-door I made my way through a crowd of drinking men, over spit-sodden sawdust to a small back parlour, where, at the farther end sat Birdie in a cloud of smoke, with a tankard of beer in front of him and a host of chattering men around. Wriggling my way between the drinkers I duly presented my small form to the important gentleman, who, in turn presented his ear to my mouth to catch the whisper of my father's name. Then he referred to his notes, pulled out a handful of silver as if from an infinite supply, and quietly slipped the amount due into my hand. My dismissal was invariably

accompanied by a benevolent smile as if illegal book-making was the most satisfying occupation in the world. To me it was far from satisfying, for I never approached that den of drinking people and its smoke-laden atmosphere, without feelings of dread.

But these daily flutters were mild affairs compared with my father's annual effort to get rich quickly. At each Cesarewitch he put a lump sum on a horse which represented his yearly savings, fervently hoping to make his dream of riches come true. His nervous tension for weeks before the event put a great strain on my mother and he often laid violent hands on us children; his presence in the home brought a direful gloom, liable to break into thunderlaps at any moment. The spasms of pleasantries arising from inflated optimism were the only relief we had.

On the day of the race he left instructions for an early newspaper to be bought giving the result; if his particular horse had won my brother or myself had to run to the little back-yard of his workshop and wave the newspaper at his window as an indication of his good fortune. Never once had the fates decreed that that errand of triumph should be made, but I often imagined how, throughout these critical afternoons, my father would keep his eyes fixed on that little back-yard, the white flame of hope dwindling away as the moments went by. Then he brought his anger and disappointment home, vented his feelings in no uncertain fashion and kept us in a state of misery for days.

It seems incredible that a man with a large family and slender resources should become so enslaved to a habit as to forfeit practically everything in life worth having. But such was the pitiful outcome of my father's vice. It warped his finer sensibilities, excluded him from the world of general knowledge, dulled his affection for home and family and never brought him a single friend. A constant anxiety to my mother, he was not likely to be esteemed by strangers, and even our closest

relations were repulsed by his querulous disposition. Well do I recall the visits of a sailor uncle, a chief petty officer in the Royal Navy, whose weather-beaten face and deep chest, and immaculate white collar over his braided uniform, appealed to my fancy. How passionately we small boys plied him with questions about his adventures on the old sailing boats, the sinking of the *Camperdown*, his exploits at the wheel on stormy nights, the interesting races he had seen and the marvellous places he had visited. How earnestly I wished that he had been my father to give me the knowledge and companionship I desired. Then there was Uncle Arthur, who came to tell us about physical training and what could be done for the preservation of health. What a thrill he gave us when he rolled up his shirt-sleeves, brought up his biceps to unthinkable dimensions, and asked us to test their rigidity. 'Use the cold sponge and the morning towel vigorously and you'll soon become another Sandow,' was his favourite advice. Also the visit of Uncle Ted, jockey and spendthrift, who dropped a real gold sovereign on the floor and refused to pick it up; uncles indeed, of romantic memories, but whose captivating talks were invariably cut short by my father's jealous resentment of our interest, which resulted in our being peremptorily sent to bed with the reminder that 'Relations don't come to gossip with kids.'

Lest my father's character begins to appear devoid of redeeming features I add that he had good qualities that cannot often be ascribed to husbands, who, in other respects, are considered good. He spared my delicate mother the task of getting up first in the morning, preparing the breakfast for us little ones, and assisting in getting us off to school. On Sundays he shared in cooking the dinner, and on Saturdays he gave us our 'Saturday ha'penny' to spend at the hucksterers. He

also helped, though not without complaint, his brother from whom he had been dissociated for many years. This brother was a music-hall star who once appeared at the top of the bill as a popular comedian and earned a substantial salary. But like many other foolish people he had squandered his substance and had become a broken, penniless man, dying with hunger and disease. It was my mission to take him a loaf and some cheese a short time before he went into the infirmary to die and be buried in a pauper's grave. Tears streamed down his face as I gave him the parcel, and as my eyes scanned the rags and tatters in the room, I felt we were related to poverty of the direst kind.

Few were the occasions when my father thought kindly of other people. His absorbing passion to find a short cut to wealth made him jealous of other's possessions and he formed judgments in accordance with the money he suspected they had and how they spent it. If he thought they were mean and grasping (which were his own failings) he scandalized them behind their backs or made cynical comments in their presence. At the same time he staged a pose of friendship with any one from whom he could borrow a few shillings when money was short. One of these quasi-friendships was with an aunt who kept with my Uncle George a public-house in a slum area of the town. Very attractive in appearance, she was not allowed out by herself on account of the jealousy of her husband; and as both of them could never be away together my aunt was kept a prisoner in that wretched establishment for over a dozen years. As money came in pretty fast and she had not the usual opportunities of spending it, she developed a craze for the most sumptuous apparel and jewellery, and appeared in the bar each night with theatrical radiance. She spent hours in careful preparation before the mirror before she took up her throne each day. People came in ostensibly to drink but actually to stare at 'The Queen,' as she was locally called. Pathetic as

her vulgar display appeared I was often taken to see my frustrated aunt in her bedizened glory, the atmosphere thick with smoke and the noisy arguments of tippling men and women. Whether she had learnt the value of showmanship to influence sales I cannot say, but certain it is that a small fortune was amassed from her poor yet loyal customers. When eventually the doors of her prison were opened through an irate soldier breaking my uncle's jaw, she became so excited over her first motor ride into the country that she immediately ordered the most expensive clothes and jewellery in which to present herself to the outer world. Once released from her sordid surroundings, there was no question of any further captivity. To my father she was an ever-present help in time of trouble.

Neither did my father consider fawning at the feet of the rich a humiliation. To promote thrift among the poor a Mrs C. made a weekly visit to a number of homes in the district to collect small contributions paid into a Savings Fund. The wife of a wealthy solicitor, Mrs C. could boast of seven grown-up daughters who shared her interest in the work and became the fairy godmothers to many poor children. She was a portly and dignified old lady with a rosy, beaming face surmounting such an ample body that when her black satin skirts came swishing into our doorway every inch of space was taken up. Being the essence of kindness she not only brought sweet smiles to cheerless homes but also the more substantial boon of useful gifts. To my mother she was a saint from heaven, and to retain her good opinion of our household steps were taken to impress her in the best manner. As the speech of Mrs C. was 'most aristocratic,' it was made incumbent on us children, nurtured on the Brummagen jargon of the streets, to exhibit our aristocratic yearnings by not speaking unless spoken to and to say 'Good morning, Mrs C.,' and 'Very well, thank you,' in the approved style. We also had to hurry home from school so that our presence,

with its accompanying good speech and behaviour might incite the inquiries that brought new clothes or new pairs of boots. On visiting day the house had a special clean up, and each of us looked as smart as soap and starch could make us. Then as the time drew near, one or other of us jumped on the old couch beneath the window and watched the great lady as she passed from one house to another in the court, so that at the signal, 'Here she comes' we could all take up position on the stage and be ready to act our parts when the curtain went up. The familiar footsteps were heard coming up the passage, followed by a little tap at the door, which my mother immediately opened, for the stately entry of Mrs C. breathing scent, satin and smiles, and looking the embodiment of life's resplendent fulness. Our first duty was to make an acknowledging bow of the head in reverential imitation of the respect we had been taught to show at the mention of a divine being. This was followed by Mrs C. wishing us 'Good morning' and 'I hope to find you all quite well,' to which we collectively replied, 'Very well, thank you.' Then we stood like statues while the twopence (it was rarely more) was collected at the altar of thrift, and the amount duly entered in the little book that always lay ready for her on the table.

One could easily be cynical of this little ceremony and its obsequious implications, but when it meant putting something in the hand of Poverty one can view it in true perspective. For Mrs C. was always ready to show her practical good nature by sending us clothes and domestic articles, of which my mother was in urgent need. I remember the gift of a clothes-wringer sending her into tears of delight. We received parcels at Christmastime, toys for the youngest children, and, blest memory of all, supplies of rich beef tea from her own kitchen, for my mother during her illnesses. To fetch this beef tea from Mrs C.'s house led to keen competition among us elder children, for it meant being ushered into a large warm savoury-smelling kitchen, where a buxom cook gave us

## CHILDHOOD

tart or pie to eat while she ladled the beef tea from a great pot that stood on a monster cooking range. If it was summer we were taken into the garden and told to collect a posy before going into the orchard to fill our pockets with the apples lying on the ground. Too awestruck to express our thanks, and dazzled by the kindness and beauty around, we then went silently away.

My mother's daily struggles to keep the home clean and her children in good health gave her little opportunity for leisure or for her own bodily fitness. She was constantly at work. My earliest recollections are associated with her violent spasms of early morning coughing, of being washed to the sound of her hard breathing, then watching her attend to the younger children, clean the home, prepare and cook the dinner, mend clothes, and remain active in some way or other until it was time for us to be put to bed. The only assistance she had was when during confinements a kindly neighbour took possession of the house and acted to us children as if she were our mother, washing and feeding us, and running up and down stairs a surprising number of times. Dressed in a velvet suit with a lace collar, I was then taken to see the new arrival, which looked like a ball of fluff nestling close to my mother, who smiled when she saw how amazed I was at the little wriggling form under the bed-clothes.

This same kind neighbour also used to come in when my mother was periodically driven to bed with bronchitis. Then I watched her make the linseed poultices, and rush with them upstairs. Realizing our bewilderment, she told us in hushed tones to be 'very good children,' and to 'make as little noise as possible, because mamma was very poorly indeed.' Though poor herself she often brought extra things to nourish my mother, and the cast-off clothing of her own growing children found a new lease of life on our bodies. And for all her unsolicited



kindness she never expected the slightest recompense. Indeed, who can fully record the wealth of kindly feeling among the working-class, where pain and hardship are reduced by neighbours acting as good physicians to one another, with no reward other than the goodness they do.

To feed a large family on the slender means of the home, required a domestic economy which accounted for every penny. Our food rationed, we were never exposed to the danger of over-feeding. Bread and lard formed the staple diet, varied by margarine or dripping when prices were favourable. Jam and cake were luxuries. Three slices of bread for each child was the morning's allowance, and these were ranged round the table beside a cup of tea, while we jostled one another in and out of the dark pantry where a single basin of water offered service to us all. Sometimes when I was hurrying through a wash at that ghostly sink to escape the imaginary terrors of the dark, an impish sister would bang-to the door, and set me quaking with fright as I stood imprisoned before the open cellar steps, which to my fancy led to a horrible cavern, from which a man or beast would spring out at any moment.

As there were not enough chairs to go round, the tallest of us stood by the table and ate the food with many side-glances to see who had the largest and thickest pieces, and look glum or satisfied accordingly. As a rule my father was in the process of cutting the bread as we came downstairs, and in our anxiety to get the largest slices we scrambled through our wash and took up position before our chosen pile while putting on a collar or combing our hair. The limit of restraint was in keeping one another under close observation. Unfortunately my younger sisters generally came off worst in the contest. We made a daily visit to the baker for four cottage loaves, and a special trip on Saturday for double the quantity, which required a large clothes-basket to carry it. This Saturday visit was an event, for not only did we return with an extra loaf as make-weight, but also with



*My Mother*



a big currant bun, which we never failed to consume on the way. Needless to say the prospect of the free bun caused much rivalry among the eligible errand-runners of the home, just as the errands with no prizes attaching gave rise to equal rivalry to avoid them. Our midday meal was a plate of thin Irish stew, varied by liver and bacon, or a dinner made out of some strange meat called 'skirton,' which I thought to be some rope-like appendage of the internal make-up of the cow. 'Half a pound of skirton,' and 'two penn'orth of bits' (for the Irish stew) are phrases that stick in my mind. The luxury of sweets or second helpings was unknown. Recalling the envious glances we made at one another's plates if one seemed better served than another, and the feelings of unsatisfied hunger with which we were almost always driven away from the table, I appreciate the story of that famished member of the Arctic Exploration Expedition who protested against having to pass a plate of food to a comrade on the grounds that he felt an uncontrollable urge to demolish it himself. Little wonder that we rushed for tea like ravenous wolves, eager to capture the chunks of bread and lard which were convenient enough to handle while playing games in the courtyard. As this was the last meal of the day I made a practice of storing a little in my pocket to munch secretly before getting into bed. What the feelings of my mother were in having constantly to refuse her hungry children I cannot say, but her forbearance in not using the cane when she discovered us pilfering leads me to think that she fully understood. That I was often guilty of domestic pilfering I am ready to confess; for what seemed more delicious in those days than the forbidden 'pickings' of newly-baked bread, a spoonful of condensed milk, or a dip into the coveted jam-jar. One vivid impression I retain is that of my mother having, on one eventful afternoon, a boiled egg for her tea, and of my astonished eyes being fixed on the luxury while I pondered the problem of how she came into possession of it.

by this besotted man groping his way up the yard, cursing and swearing, and eventually falling into the doorway of his home, where his resentful wife was ready to receive him with appropriate imprecations that soon developed into a terrific row. Then the devastation began. Smashing of windows and crockery, breaking up of furniture, followed by the screams of the attacked wife and of terrified children, and the bletherings of the drunken maniac. How my little limbs shook with fright while this was going on. The upheaval lasted until the sobbing woman was taken in by neighbours, and the wretched husband became harmless in sleep.

Another character who disturbed our repose was the ne'er-do-well son of a neighbour who looked the prototype of Bill Sykes. Never known to work, he was periodically thrown out by his industrious father, and after a spell in prison or the workhouse returned the worse for drink, and in such a devilish mood that he and his father soon came to blows, while his anguished mother tried to separate them. Then the policeman's voice was heard as the drunken reprobate was unceremoniously hustled out of the court.

These experiences, however, were interspersed by emotions of a happier kind. As the elder boys of the court carried on their games after I was put to bed, their joyous shouting and the crack of ball on bat echoed up to my room, and gave me a share in the excitement going on. Occasionally a ball or catapult came sailing through the window, and gave me the delight of throwing it into the branches of the tree. Then came the week-end parties at neighbours' houses, when laughter and merriment dissolved in the sentimental renderings of *Sweet Genevieve*, *Queen of the Earth*, *The Lost Chord*, and *Love's Old Sweet Song*, supplemented by the more vigorous diapason of concertina and mouth-organs. And how the midnight farewells characterized the jargon and sentiments of those Midland folk: 'Good night, Bill; yo and Pem must come down our way, some time.' 'Weer

your Nell gone to werk now? I erred she'd changed 'err job.' 'So lon' Jo. Gi' the ol' bloke a drink on moi be'arf!'

Then, as a grand finale, the concertina opened up again with a popular tune, accompanied by wild clapping of hands and dancing feet until the merrymakers chattered their way out into the street and went back to their own little homes.

As the summer waned and autumn's short days kept us indoors we looked forward with rapturous delight to Guy Fawkes Day and the excitement it provided. Every court had its bonfire and for weeks ahead the elder boys went off on mysterious pilgrimages towards nightfall and returned with huge branches of trees, coal, wooden blocks, and all sorts of combustible material, which they piled against the wall in readiness for the conflagration. The 'spoils of conquest' were often raided by lads from other courts.

I suppose few things could be more thrilling to a child's mind than the spectacle of a huge bonfire at night, blazing within a small area of houses which become alive with fantastic shadows. To me it was wonderful, and I still have the mental picture of the flying sparks, the leaping tongues of fire and of Tommy Willets plunging a coveted firework into the sizzling wood for it to burst into a cascade of colours and make me jump with delight. 'Stand away, will yer, else you'll get it in yer eyes,' shouted my mother, but this only had the effect of urging me to creep a little nearer. Then I was frightened out of my skin by a rocket shooting up, followed by another in the next court, as if indeed, they were chasing one another into the heavens. A lot of the fun happened during the early evening when the boys were in control, but the real gala started when the fathers came home from work and generous hands were dipped into pockets for a further assortment of

fireworks. Then the court became a flaming inferno of crackling wood, red-hot coals, and gushing smoke, with squibs and wheels raining fairy lights, and a host of little fire-worshippers dashing backwards and forwards with flashing eyes, while elder brethren manœuvred the major attractions with equal delight, and maternal scoldings broke on the magic circle as Willie was ordered 'to come away from theer,' and Georgie to 'stop puttin' crackers be'ind Mrs Jones,' supplemented by the howlings of a youngster brutally pulled away from the rejoicings for the unattractive demands of bed. And as the fire burnt low, leaving a mass of twinkling embers to awaken immemorial sentiments in hearts of common understanding, so the people sat round and plaintively sang familiar refrains while we children watched our 'taters' roast on the fire.

Of the usual childish ailments we escaped few, and gave mother a busy time when the plagues were about. I remember four of us being in the same bed with chicken-pox, my father trying to counteract the infection by lighting tar at the foot of the stairs and allowing the fumes to ascend to our bedroom. To prevent us scratching the sores was the constant worry of mother, who pretty well exhausted herself running up and down the stairs. Later, I was taken to the hospital with scarlet fever, where a wealthy visitor tried hard to persuade my parents to hand me over for adoption. I have wondered since into what different channels life might have flowed had I passed, with only five summers to my credit, into the care of other people.

My earliest recollection of school is that of trudging along in the winter's snow and crying all the way with the cold as my exposed hands clutched the equally cold fingers of my elder brother and sister. This was when the Infants Department of St James's Church School became a thawing centre for the frozen mites that

converged on it with half-filled stomachs and threadbare clothes, to be stood in front of a flaming fire till both apparel and tears were dry. School-money was paid in those days even by the poorest, and it was a great relief to my mother when the Board of Education became responsible for the Church Schools, and made elementary education entirely free.

Passing into the Boys' Department, I became numbered among the seething mass of boys who gathered in the large playground before lessons like litters of pups, shouting, whistling, kicking balls, rolling marbles, spinning tops, pulling one another about, and keeping up a whirlwind of noisy excitement until the old bell stopped clanging and the headmaster blew his whistle when every one suddenly stopped still. The headmaster, or the 'Guv'ner,' as he was generally called, was a bearded old gentleman of portly stature, to whom the allegiance of the school depended more on the terrors of the stick than on any understanding of his pupils. His desk was elevated in the main class-room, and though obscured by the dividing curtains that were pulled along at lesson time, he sat within ear-shot of all that was going on. Each morning he conducted the opening service, which consisted of a hymn, a reading from scripture, prayers, and the singing of the doxology. Judging from his roseate appearance, he had good reason to 'Praise God from whom all blessings flow.' He threw into relief the 'praises' of the pale little figures whose 'blessings' were very feebly enjoyed in the breakfast they had eaten and the clothes they wore. Not that unsatisfied hunger spoke from the cheeks of every child, for varying types of homes were represented at the school. Whether I looked hungry or no made no difference to the fact that I felt hungry, for the three slices of bread and lard seemed only to have got over the fringes of my appetite and left me eager for more. Consequently, my first thought during the opening lesson had more to do with physical than mental nourishment, which set my fingers



poking about in my pocket to make a break in the newspaper that enclosed a morsel of lunch. As this could only be legally eaten at play-time, I had to wait for the teacher's back to be turned before I could slip a piece into my mouth and trust to the gods that no question would be asked or movements of my lips detected before it had safely disappeared. But I had no monopoly in this irregular type of feeding. A number of other boys were equally as active and at opportune moments made a simultaneous movement of hands to mouth that would have perplexed a casual observer. If one of us was caught it meant going before the 'Guv'ner.'

As classes were large and teachers few, individual tuition was scant. The three R's were the basic subjects, and scripture study took up a big slice of the time. And through this study I gained the first inklings of sex knowledge. Fascinating as the Old Testament was in the graphic descriptions of battles, murders, and floods, the sex lore of Leviticus was our chief attraction, for it inspired earnest inquiry into the full meaning of adultery, fornication, and childbirth, the information being communicated to each other by gestures and whisperings that cleared up some of the mysteries that puzzled our inquisitive minds. The spinster lady who took the class often caught us in the act of gloating over delectable passages instead of following the story of David and Goliath, while she must have noticed how particular pages were thumb-marked and that the marginal notes were anything but decent. Like most of the boys I learned the essential facts about sex at a very early age, and if at that time my mother had explained the laws in a simple fashion the knowledge I picked up from the streets would have been cleansed of its indecent implications. The idea that boys grow up innocent of such knowledge, and that parental instruction tends to excite an unhealthy interest in the subject results in precisely the reverse effect to that intended. The early stirring of sex instinct demands adequate knowledge to keep it in healthy control.

Passing into higher standards brought me under the influence of teachers who left deeper impressions than they probably imagined. I say this because most elementary school children subject the teachers to a greater responsibility than is often recognized. The one I revered most was Frank Mullings (of musical fame), who in those days was a Schubertian type of young man with bushy hair, a rather lean figure and a swallow-tailed coat that circled round him during moments of excitement. And these moments were many. For Mullings was not the sort of man easily to adapt his artistic sensibilities to the rough and tumble over which he had to exercise daily control. The classes at that time were much larger and more cumbersome to handle than they are to-day, and thinking of his difficulties in retrospect I can well imagine Mullings the teacher gladly shedding this part of life's responsibilities for the more attractive sphere of Frank Mullings, the singer and operatic star. But what boy coming within the orbit of that volatile personality could forget the fortissimo and cadence of its expression. In the cooped up atmosphere of the class-room, with probably the lilt of the Brandenburg Symphony passing through his mind, or an aria from *Faust* testing his memory, it was obviously a trying ordeal for him to be wrestling at the same time with a geometrical problem and to have a host of unsympathetic urchins shying paper arrows at his hair, and making unflattering remarks each time his face was turned to the blackboard. For then his wrath permeated his crimson face which, in company with his coat-tails, came swishing round with the object of spotting a transgressor. If successful he roared at the culprit like a lion but with the heart of a lamb; rent the air with his breath and his hair with his fingers, while the lads in front received the spray from his mouth, and those at the back the counterblast of his vigorous yet melodious voice.

'Watkins, if you do that again I shall thrash you!'

sounded the roar. Watkins does it again and is caught. With fiery eyes and streaming hair, away rushes the chastiser, nearly falling over the desks and threatening to trample to death any boy that gets in his way, till Watkins, whose arms automatically rise in self-defence, is reached, when the threatened attack suffers collapse and the anticipated contest, to the general disgust of the class, gives way to a mild supplication for Watkins to be better behaved and a more desirable example to the school. But the real Mullings emerged in singing lessons, when his love of music triumphed over the unruly pupils. Then he became the Orpheus among the Dryads; the charming *maestro* demonstrating the difference between costal and diaphragmatic breathing; between the gurgitated noise at the back of the throat and the clean, resonant tone on the tip of the tongue; and between the unbridled bellowing of the Soldier's Chorus and the harmonic character of restrained rendering. It was this ardent sincerity to give the best of his knowledge and to make us musically conscious that forced a truce from our rascality by which to demonstrate that for at least twice a week we could be amenable to good manners and capable of excellent work. For an elementary school this training was exceptional and if it did no more than to inspire us with musical appreciation, such enrichment of young life was an achievement of which any teacher might be proud.

There was another excellent quality in Mullings in that he readily paid for new cricket-balls and footballs as rapidly as they were lost. He rated the freedom of the playground much higher than the obligations of the class-room and he was quite prepared to pay for his preference and to take a lively participation in the games. Our difficulty was in keeping out of the way of his long legs, for in kicking the ball about at a whirlwind pace we tried to dart between them or render them less obstructive by jumping on his toes. If the ball burst we swore his kick had done it and compensation would

be immediately forthcoming. With a seraphic smile a lad was handed a sixpence. The same thing happened at cricket. When a mighty hit sent the ball over the house-tops, it was Mullings's money that revived both our spirits and the game. In fact, his generosity meant more to us than a bare recital of it may indicate, and if in later years I shared a wider expression of it in the concert halls when the same benefactor responded to encores for his beautiful singing, it was to pay homage as well to his good deeds of the past.

Another teacher of less pleasant memory was Barry, a man whose manner and behaviour were most repellent. In contrast to Mullings, Barry was fatally attached to his profession, and having no sensitive views about authority, fully exploited a licence for punishing in a manner that would not be tolerated to-day. His method was not to tear his hair (it was too greased down for that) or to go off into high explosives, but cunningly to watch for misbehaviour with apparent unconcern, and then make for a lad as if to thrash him, but actually to give another boy sitting near a clout across the head or a thump in the ribs. As I was often the victim of this presumably smart yet senseless form of indirect punishment I can vouch that apart from the physical injury it might have caused, the shock to the nervous system was an equally serious matter. Another bright idea of Barry's was to give the back of the hand a severe upward blow instead of bringing the stick down on the palm as was normally the practice. A wise headmaster would have curbed the antics of this 'clever' young man, but they were sanctioned because the 'Guv'ner' himself used a stick that was dreaded more than any other. It was long, flexible, and relentless, and was exercised to give a sort of punishment *de luxe*. Truants were often put across a desk and thrashed. The usual ritual, however, was for the 'Guv'ner' to hold the offender over his knee and strike away until he got purple in the face and his victim screamed with pain, while the rest of the class

sat in a state of hushed horror at this exhibition of discipline. Of course, as in most elementary schools, angry parents paid occasional visits after these episodes.

Corporal punishment in schools was closely linked with the general social attitude towards the treatment of children. Every form of cruelty from the burning of witches to the present birching of young boys has received the sanction of the scriptures, and the brutal shibboleth, 'Spare the rod and spoil the child,' which was used to justify the barbarities of the Dark Age of child-life in the nineteenth century is still reflected in the legal and social code of to-day. Animals are held in much higher respect. Magistrates express the greatest horror of a horse or dog being ill-treated, and send the offenders to prison. But with regard to cruelty to children, few magistrates are incensed beyond the imposing of a fine. Thus, while the number of prosecutions for child cruelty is mounting each year, and without the press, preachers, or politicians stirring a hair, an archbishop can declare the Church's love and protection of the lower species by the inauguration of an Animal Sunday as if the 'Cry of the Children' had never been heard.

Barry treated Mullings with mixed humour and contempt, and if he was mean with money he was over-generous in cynically belittling his colleague in front of the class. This often happened when Mullings was in a state of high explosion and fuming with rage, for Barry, instead of entering the room to inspire better respect for the teacher, put on a wry grin and made some unflattering remark that encouraged the boys in misbehaviour. Mullings smarted under this humiliation, and abiding his time, was eventually rewarded. It happened at the Birmingham Town Hall. Mullings was starred as the principal singer at one of the most important orchestral concerts, which I attended with enthusiasm to hear my former teacher for the first time in public. He had already begun to win laurels in

Grand Opera, but his rendering on that occasion of 'Lend me Your Aid' and the 'Swan Song' from *Lohengrin*, was a thrill I shall never forget. His lean figure of schoolboy days had developed to massive proportions and his fine tenor voice had taken on unusual quality. To hear his top C's soar above the orchestra was to appreciate the limitations of other singers whom I thought had reached the top-notch in the musical world. And, judging from the ovation he received, the audience certainly anticipated the fame he was to achieve in subsequent years. When the concert was over I made my way to the reception room and presented myself as a former scholar who wished to pay tribute to his singing. He received me gladly and invited me to have supper with him at the Midland Hotel. This was startling to an impressionable youth, especially when he disregarded every other soul in the hall and escorted my small person into the street. He was the same naïve, ingenuous Frank Mullings I knew at school. Susceptible to praise, he found me not lacking in expression, but his greatest delight was to hear that his old adversary, Barry, had sat at his feet in the stalls and had contributed to the applause. What a triumph! He revelled in it as one who could put the cockade in his hat or bring home the bays from the field of battle.

Like most schoolboys I entered into games and shared the jealous rivalries that made heroes of some and cowards of others. To which class I belonged it is difficult to tell, for though I could unsheathe the sword half-way in a quarrel, I immediately compromised to have it pushed back if my adversary showed greater daring in the use of his own weapon. Often I called the bluff which nearly led to a fight, only to find myself capitulating when I was faced by a sparring attitude. This gave me the coward's remorse, for I realized that had I shown a braver acceptance of the challenge, I

might have forced a surrender in my favour. What I was sure about was that I lacked the courage to give the first punch. In consequence I was content to let other boys do the shedding of blood and aspire to become 'Cock of the School.' But the fights that periodically took place were always sufficiently dramatic to capture my interest. As in the old duelling days they were generally founded on some personal affront to one's honour or self-respect. During lessons Massie would audibly remark that Whitehead hadn't washed his neck, or that his collar could do with a little more whitewash—a remark fully supported by his own pugilistic reputation. 'Do you stand for that, Whitenob?' ask a few witnesses of the insult, all itching for a quarrel; which incites the offended one to turn round and remind Massie of his drunkard father and patched-up knickerbockers, or most unkindest cut of all, of his dirty shirt hanging out at the back; from which interchange of flattering remarks emerges the challenge that Massie will make Whitenob 'stick 'em up any day.' As the latter also happened to have a good pair of fists to stick up any day, his seconds passed back the word that Whitenob would see about it when they got outside. This meant a fight, of course, and in a few minutes the whole school learnt of the 'scrap' as if by wireless, and proceeded to take sides for the event. The contest took place up a quiet little crescent opposite the school, and it was to this battleground that all eyes and feet were turned as soon as lessons were over.

Surrounded by intimidating supporters there was no question of the olive branch appearing from either side and in a few moments positions were taken up on door-steps, walls, and railings by a mass of excited boys. Then the fight began. A mad rush at one another indicated a mutual anxiety to end the combat with the first blow, but, whatever they do in the professional ring, this was unthinkable to an audience fully prepared for a thrilling war of attrition. So the partisans spurred

the combatants on to further deeds of valour. 'Goo on, Massie, give 'im one in the jaw fer that.' 'Good ole Whitenob, stick at 'im,' 'Cop that one,' 'Fill 'is eye up, Massie,' 'Give 'im a bloody nose, Whitenob,' could be heard as the tide of battle rolled backwards and forwards. But just as the excitement was at its highest, and the knock-out blow was expected at any moment, an upper window of the corner house went up and the contents of a certain receptacle came down, which had a dampening effect on the proceedings and caused an inglorious cessation of hostilities as the woman at the window instituted a general retreat with the power of her tongue. This had the effect of amalgamating the rival forces in mutual resentment. At many of the fights, however, blood flowed freely and horrified me to the point of always keeping on excellent terms with the Cocks of the School and of maintaining a warm regard for pacifism.

Unfortunate was the day for an elderly solicitor when he decided to spend the evening of life in a house within a hundred yards of the school, for the boys soon came to regard him as existing to supply something of the spice of life. And not without good reason. He was a little shrivelled-up man with the face of a Scrooge and the heart of a Bumble, and could never meet us in the street without threatening us with his big stick and growling out remarks as if he were attacking a social pestilence. Thus he excited the spirits of the adventurous and the fears of the timid; he frequently appeared on his doorstep in a bloodthirsty state, eager to wreak vengeance on the boys who had plastered his windows or tied the door-knob to the handle of the bell before giving the latter a vigorous pull. On one occasion, when the laying of a water-main caused a high ridge of clay to extend in front of his house, he was so incensed by a bombardment of his door that he chased the culprits to the top of the ridge and slipped down the other side into the trench, from whence he emerged more sticky than subdued. But the grand finale to these escapades



came one winter's day when 'Lawyer,' as he was called, was seen trudging through the snow. A hasty supply of ammunition was heaped behind the playground door and as soon as he came within range a fusillade of snow-balls greeted him. Too exasperated to pass on like a gentleman, he advanced towards his attackers, brandishing Excalibur in air and sounding a dreadful war-cry. We retreated into the school, little thinking that our pursuer would have the effrontery to pass through the portals and on through the various class-rooms, through which we stampeded like a herd of frenzied animals, knocking down blackboards, overturning chairs, and causing such a wild confusion that teachers thought a madman was after our blood and required forcible treatment. Later on, he appeared before the judgment seat of the 'Guv'ner' to state his case, and the warning we received showed that the verdict had gone against us. More impressive still, was the policeman who afterwards paraded in front of his house for some days. He created the greatest impression of all by leaving the district altogether soon after.

Now I will enter the confessional. In the lives of most schoolboys there are shady patches from which they may successfully emerge and leave but a memory of their offences. The unfortunate ones are those who are caught in trifling misdeeds, hauled before a magistrate and stigmatized as potential criminals by either a birching, a recorded fine, or a sentence to an industrial school. As the law stands a boy as young as eight years of age can be birched. Imagine the procedure. For some petty offence which would evaporate under wise treatment, the child is taken before a court, where a magistrate, more frightening than any doctor or dentist, solemnly declares that only a birching will give the lad the sort of moral sense necessary for his salvation. As the 'crime' is generally against property, namely, stealing, inquiries

about the child's environment, home influences, and the normal state of his stomach are seldom made. He is ordered to be birched and given a few days of terrorist anticipation of what he is to undergo.

This preamble is to prepare the reader for the disclosures I am about to make and to induce a more charitable verdict than may otherwise be given on my behaviour.

My offence was pilfering, and the motive, hunger. Not having sufficient to eat, my growing body called out for food, and as this urge was more insistent than any moral understanding, I responded by employing any device I could to pacify my disgruntled appetite. One of my earliest victims was a feeble old man who kept a small sweet-shop not far from the school. Slow in movement and failing in sight, it took him a little time to get the sweets from the window and weigh them in the scales that lay on the counter. To avoid the weights being stolen he had tied them together with string. Under the scale was a small cross-bar that served as a useful fixture for an extra weight that could be entirely hidden from view, so when the old shopkeeper went to fumble in the window for my ha'porth of sweets (I generally selected those most difficult to reach), I adroitly fixed this additional weight underneath and got extraordinary value for my money. This ruse I successfully carried out for some time and was stopped by the daughter taking over the shop and putting the scales well out of reach.

Another poor old man I defrauded, kept a miserable huckster shop a few doors from our home. He had a fowl-run at the back and as my father developed a craze for sucking a raw egg once or twice a week I was sent out in the early morning to get one of the freshly laid. It happened that the shopkeeper kept his eggs in a cupboard in the living-room, and I discovered that the time it took him to saunter backwards and forwards for the egg enabled me to stretch over the rather low

counter, extract a few coppers from the till, and regain my position, to look the picture of innocence before he returned. Happily, I met my Waterloo in this shameful escapade, for one morning I found the till would not respond to my customary handling, and in giving it an extra pull, brought a large knife, that had been fixed in it as a trap, crashing to the floor. Back came the old man in righteous fury, to charge me with tampering with the till, but by that time I had hopped away to the other side of the shop, and putting on the white lily of a blameless life, protested vigorously that I had never touched the till or the stolen money.

Thinking of eggs, takes me back to a grocer's shop that still exists at the corner of the road wherein I was born. For there were displayed the dainties that made an irresistible appeal to my boyish appetite and set my fingers constantly in action. The biscuits in the glass case near the door were particularly attractive, and when I noticed that the lids were unlocked and that I could help myself if only the shopkeeper were invisible, I planned to give effect to my discovery. On Saturday nights the shop was crowded with busy customers, so that a convenient screen was thrown up between the counter and me standing with back pressed up to the case, so that I was able to lift the lid with one hand and pocket the biscuits with the other. So keen was my observation in the process that though customers came and went, I was never detected. I also showed alarming audacity by going into the shop to pilfer without making a single purchase. Noticing that unless he had someone to serve, the grocer was generally engaged in a back room and not particularly swift in putting in an appearance, I adopted the ruse of stepping into the shop, flashing a jelly or an egg into my pocket, tiptoeing a few paces, and of then boldly marching forward with resounding step to make my presence known. I then asked the shopman if he kept something which I knew could only be got at the chemist's and calmly walked

out with the information and the booty. I could have crept stealthily from the shop without the grocer being aware of my presence, but this would have seemed too much like downright robbery for my conscience. If there appeared no sign of suspicion after I had shown a legitimate reason for entering, I suffered no moral disquietude.

The local greengrocer's also came under my attention. To walk past a basket of carrots without scooping one into my pocket seemed as wasteful as going for mother's potatoes without reducing the quantity of juicy apples within arm's reach. Indeed, carrot-nibbling at school was a widespread practice. Neither did I scruple to benefit from pilfering by other boys if the going was good. That is why I sought the companionship of Burley, a lad employed at half-time work at a butcher's shop, where apparently the accountancy was defective. I gathered this from the fact that Burley was often in mysterious possession of a few shillings on Monday afternoons and able to invite me to share in the disposal thereof during the evening. Our first procedure was to seek an obscure corner in an Italian shop and demolish an immoderate amount of ice cream before purchasing a hefty packet of chocolates to sustain us at the first house of the Birmingham Hippodrome. Nothing short of seats in the front row of the stalls would satisfy us, and I recall how the tall, uniformed man at the entrance turned suspicious eyes on two young urchins strutting boldly into the expensive part of the theatre, as if our position near the band had been acquired by social right. And if I praised and clapped every performer it was to show as much appreciation of their merit as of Burley's connection with the butcher's shop. One Saturday evening, however, he unexpectedly got the sack.

Finally, there was the shameful history of pilfering from that good-hearted neighbour, Mrs L., for whom I ran errands and acted as nurse-boy to her infant son.

To protect the bread I fetched from the bakers, she gave me a towel, in which I also put the change. But sometimes I kept the money, and as Mrs L.'s memory was deficient, a day might go by before she made inquiries, when I affirmed that I had put it in the towel, and, that if she had not found it, it must have fallen out. For a time the trusting woman believed what I said, but, becoming suspicious, she sent me for the bread unusually early one Saturday morning. On returning, I placed the bread on the pantry shelf without a word. Receiving the familiar reply from me later in the day, and knowing that I had not left the house in the interval, she told me to turn out my pockets. Out came the marbles, string, buttons, penknife, chalk, and the usual stock-in-trade of a boy, but no money; which resulted in my receiving a gracious admonition and a lump of cake. The good woman little thought that the money had been nestling inside my boots.

Not the least uncommendable feature about this shady side of my character was that while I was breaking commandments in the interests of my stomach I was singing in the church choir on Sundays for the promotion of my soul. Not for me does St Asaph's Church stand as a place for spiritual regeneration but rather as a centre for the compounding of sanctity and sin by young choristers in pursuit of the pleasure to be derived from both. For my brother and I were sent among the 'angels,' not for reasons of salvation, but chiefly to put into my mother's purse the small quarterly stipend we received for our services. This was clearly suggested by the kind-hearted, venerable vicar of the church who used to visit our home, for when he learned of the state of our finances he sent us along to the choirmaster to have our voices tested. Mercifully, the ordeal was sufficiently frightening to subdue the raucous intonations of the playground, so that we must have given a seraphic rendering of the scales for the choirmaster to decide there and then that I could worthily uphold the decani,

and my brother the cantoris, side. Thus I came to learn that choirboys were in greater need of redemption than the admiring souls to whom they sang, and to whom they appeared as seraphim personified. If the testimony of Mr Brown, the curate, stood for anything, we certainly would have been found guilty of being Beelzebub's children, for as he happened to be one of those genial parsons to whom an insult becomes a pleasure, we made a practice of securing the greatest happiness for the greatest number by tying string across the dark entrance to the vestry, whereby to trip him up. His peculiar round hat was also honoured by the contents of a can of water balanced on the top of the door.

But let me return to the more sombre path of pilfering. To munch sweets during the church service was an offence which rendered the culprit liable to a fine. But as rules were made to be broken, most of us had a packet of liquorice all-sorts or Rowntree's pastilles tucked away in the cassock pocket. To guard against detection by the watchful eyes of the choirmaster observant of the mirror attached to the organ, we kept the music-books well raised above the level of our mouths. But as sweets were not always available we fell back on reserves of a different nature. Opposite the church was an entry that led to the storehouse of a baker's shop, the door of which, for some strange reason, we discovered was seldom locked. Boxes of currants and raisins lay open in prodigal profusion, so what could mischievous choirboys do but fill their pockets with the fruit. On one occasion while the vicar was delivering a Wednesday evening homily from the pulpit, Watkins, an irresponsible boy who sat outside the survey of the choirmaster, brought into action a pea-spitter, through which he shot the pips of the raisins at the boys on the opposite side of the chancel. Each time he hit the target his explosive mirth became more than a private affair, and eventually so incensed the vicar, that he suddenly stopped in his sermon, turned round to catch Watkins in the act,

and peremptorily exclaimed: 'Watkins, leave the church at once.' Whereupon, Watkins, crestfallen, got up and walked out.

My own moral desecration generally took place on Sundays. Sitting at the bottom of the row, it was my business while I filled that position, to take the collection of the senior choristers and to bring the proceeds to the vestry after the service was over. While going down the steps (which were dimly lighted), with the plate in my hand, I was able to finger a coin over the edge with the quiet dexterity of a conjuror's art and keep it safely hidden in the palm of my hand as I put the plate on the vicar's table and disrobed in full view of every one concerned. Outside the church, the coin underwent a rapid exchange of values in my favourite ice-cream shop. My next exploit I am almost ashamed to record. Apparently influenced by my innocent appearance, the verger invited me to assist him in various duties before service, in return for a few coppers, according to the state of his memory. My job was to arrange the hymn-books in the pews, dust seats, and light the gas-jets round the walls. Before the doors opened a preliminary bell-ringing took place, which the verger executed from a platform in a remote corner of the gallery. The process of gas-lighting commenced at this moment, for left to myself, I discovered that by inserting a warm end of the wax taper into the slot of the Poor Box it would stick to a coin that could be drawn up through the transverse slot that was free of interruption. If a penny happened to fall back into the box the clanging of the old bell cancelled the noise, and I tried my luck again. This ingenious deceit came to me as if by inspiration and I was elated at its success. If I gave the matter any moral consideration at all it was to persuade myself that such gifts as the box contained might be disbursed among people better off than I, so that I was actually furthering the intentions of the benefactors. Further opportunities to stretch the pilfering hand arrived on Harvest Sunday.

With all the alcoves of the church filled with fruit and bunches of delicious grapes dangling from bracket and bough I felt like Tantalus removed from the curse, but subject to the restraining fear that too drastic a raid might lead to awkward questions being asked. Apples and oranges found their way into my pocket and I was most careful to rearrange the setting so that no incriminating gaps could be seen. Then I joined the choristers in the vestry and duly appeared at the Harvest Service in a freshly-laundered vestment of white, and sang the hosannahs of thankfulness and praise until I arrived at the words:

All good gifts around us  
Are sent from heaven above.

when I felt that I had not defrauded any worldly being of the fruit. Like most choirboys, I wanted the congregation to think I was really as saintly as I appeared.

As the reader may be wondering into what channels of crime these early tendencies led me I will add that by the time I left school and had a better supply of daily food, the urge to pilfer faded out and released my attention. How different might have been the results, had I been caught and given a birching, or made conscious of criminal tendencies by the arm of the law. If judges never tire of pointing out the iniquity of the harsh sentences originally imposed on hardened 'jail-birds,' how much more necessary it is to protect the sensibilities of delinquent children from official punishment. Hunger sharpens the wits of the underfed children of the slums, and to expect them to remain honest when a little pilfering profits their stomach is like expecting the stockbroker to show self-denial when he can grab something for his banking account.

The brighter side of choirboy life starts in the home, where on Sunday morning there was much activity in blacking boots, dressing up in our best suits and starched



linen collars, and finally in fixing on our well-brushed heads the mortar-board hat—flat top and silken tassel—which was such an elevation from the grimy tweed cap of week-day life that under its influence my brother and I felt immensely superior to the other boys of the court and walked as if we belonged to a Grand Order of Respectability. It was not surprising that we became the objects of ridicule and rude remarks as soon as we put in an appearance. 'Garrity the howlers,' 'Look at the starchies,' 'Tuppence for yer splice, Garrity'—remarks which struck at our dignity but which we thought prudent to ignore. This discretion was strengthened by our rapid rise in the choir. Whether it was the volume or the value of our voices that impressed most I am not in a position to decide, but certain it is that in a comparatively short time we both became solo singers. This carried the privilege of a seat that gave us a close-up view of the congregation, and pleasant it was to have our importance duly recognized by our favourite girl friends, who sat in the front pews to ogle at us over their hymn-books and tempt us to return furtive smiles under the warning gaze of the observant choirmaster.

As I made my début as a soloist on an Easter Sunday I must recall that event if only to awaken the understanding of church-goers who accept the vocal efforts of choirboys with unmindful regard of the ordeal that is often involved. Although it was only about a line and a half of an anthem I had to sing, the prospect of hearing my own voice with critical eyes fixed on me, and worst horror of all, with young Emily Todd and that fascinating minx Fanny Jackson sitting in the front seat, ready to trample over me with ridicule, should I break down, gave me a pain at the pit of the stomach from the time I rose in the morning till a private rehearsal after breakfast assured me that I was all right. But the pain returned as I approached the church, fervently hoping that the prayers would be long, and the special psalms longer, and the hymns longer still, to delay the anthem as long

as possible. When we started to file up the steps I felt like a young Sidney Carton on the way to the scaffold. Fanny Jackson was sitting there as I expected, but meeting my eyes with such a sweet smile that when I took up the position at the top of the choir I turned an erect head to let the congregation know that if I fell I should at least fall like a hero. Fall indeed — the service has started. I stand up with the choir in a sort of haze. 'Days and Moments Quickly Flying'; see, we sang that last Friday. Moments quickly flying now. The anthem starts and the men lead off. I scramble in with the sopranos and try to think whether my solo part is on the third or fourth page. Good heavens, we galloped that page! Over the next. Over the page again. My eyes jump to the bars I have to sing and a petrifying feeling surges over me. I ignore the instructions of the composer and, half panic-stricken, try to rush ahead of the choir, to be at the starting point in good time. Have I got the note; wait two beats; is that Fanny Jackson still there? The singing stops. The organ fades away. I can hardly breathe. Two beats. I can hear my own voice sounding in a tremendous vacuum. Just able to get out the notes in that vast stillness, with my head on the point of bursting, and then to feel a sudden emergence from a tunnel, or the entry into a comfortable room from a storm as the whole choir picks up the melody and carries me with collective responsibility under which I now sing with triumphant awareness of success. I am assured of this by a smile from Fanny Jackson.

On Easter Monday I was seldom among the fortunate boys who went picnicking or to open the cricket season in the park. This was because the verger thought it more important to have my help at the orgy of weddings that took place on that day, which kept us both exceptionally busy. The parties of friends were already light-hearted with drink and paid little respect to the sanctity of church or ceremony, judging from

the joking and tittering that went on. And being too poor to make any special provision in dress, it was difficult to tell among the shawls and mufflers who were the nuptial couples until they bantered their way to the altar steps. On one occasion the frantic search for the ring in the bridegroom's pockets raised such laughter that his supporting party was sternly rebuked by the vicar. But the latter was a good Christian, who was always most tolerant towards these people. After the service the married couples went into the vestry to receive his customary advice and well-wishes, but I was often alarmed by the startling admissions I heard in the course of the interview.

'I 'aven't tuppence to bless meself wiv, mister.'

'We just got a few sticks to start the 'ome, sir; shall 'ave to sponge on the old folks fer a time.'

'Five bob would set us goin', sir, if some sport would only trust us.'

And of course they were trusted by the kind-hearted old vicar, who sent them away all smiles. Had there been a competition for confetti sweepers that day, I think I should have been in the running for the first prize.

If all the choirboys of the past and present were asked to name the most impressive event of their experience, I think they would choose carol-singing at Christmas. A whole library of adventure has been written by people who have travelled the world, explored the Poles, or hazarded the dangers of the jungle, but where is the recorded epic of the sturdy little choirboys who trudge the Christmas snows to gladden the hearts of people enjoying the warmth of a festive fireside, till hoarse and weary, they return in the late hours to the light and laughter of their own small homes to reflect on the joys they have missed and the money they have gained. To me it was indeed an epic. For to join the expedition one had to be among the top six boys in the choir, since

a larger number would have seriously reduced the portions of the spoils. It was also of special importance to have to learn the special repertoire of carols selected for us by the choirmaster, who gave us special rehearsals until we could sing them all most efficiently. Then we drew up a list of those members of the congregation whose worldly possessions seemed worthy of enticement, and we set out after morning service on Christmas Day replete with music and bicycle-lamps and our best sartorial make-up. We viewed this official carol-singing as a supremely superior art to 'chancing your luck' outside the houses that happened to have a light in the windows. Not for us the exercise of talent without knowing whether it was to be suitably rewarded. We rang the bell before and not after we had sung, because to stand outside the door was an indignity we could not tolerate—in theory, but not always in practice. For there were one or two grumpy people who humiliated us by not asking us inside (hence the need for the bicycle-lamps), but we revenged ourselves by singing flat and cutting out favourite verses. The general rule was for us to be graciously received by the host of the house as desirable pilgrims of Good King Wenceslas, who had rather looked in than out on the feast with the object of charming his guests with Orphean praise and ourselves with half a sovereign and a mince-pie. To step in those carpeted halls from the snow or a bitterly cold wind gave us a chance to thaw. The applause would break out with startling generosity, after which the host appeared with beaming face and fat cigar to compliment us on our performance and to hand us the reward that seldom exceeded expectations. On one occasion we received a gold sovereign and were so impressed by the magnitude of the gift that we all had turns in trying to bite it under the first street lamp we arrived at to be assured of its genuineness. Happily the money was sometimes supplemented by the food and drink that kept us going.

To forfeit the home joys of Christmas Day (doubtful as they were in our family), was no light matter to boys of our age, but the hardship was lightened by the small windfall we brought to our mother. I recall the joyous brightness of her eyes as we handed her the money, and how solemnly she promised us a new overcoat or a new pair of boots as recompense for our efforts. Total confiscation would probably have brought a protest but we gladly surrendered the proceeds to her care.

Another shilling was added to the weekly income by my taking on the job of organ-blower to the choirmaster and his assistant for practice purposes. The latter was an assiduous young man who claimed me for four mornings of the week to thrash out Bach and Handel from 7.30 a.m. to a few minutes before school-time, when I dashed away as fast as I could with perspiration streaming down my face. I heartily dreaded this job, for it meant turning out in the cold winters' mornings with little breakfast inside me, calling at the verger's house for the key that opened the vestry door, and then entering the vault-like church. Then I made my way to the rectangular space at the back of the organ, known as the 'cell', lit the gas-jet, and waited for the organist to start. The cell bore an appropriate name, for the walls and woodwork were covered with initials, names and dates, and a few choice superscriptions that perpetuated the memory of former occupants, who, like myself, probably viewed the place as a miniature Pentonville. It existed for hard labour. Behind a small curtain that shut off the body of the church, I was kept busy working the blow-handle up and down to keep the pipes of the organ well supplied with wind. The rate of consumption was indicated by a moving piece of lead attached to string that fell to a given point when the organ was full and receded to another when it was empty. The unforgivable sin was to put the organist out of action by not keeping up a sufficient supply of wind.

What the treadmill did for the legs, this blow-handle

did for my arms, for I found it most tiring and monotonous. As a boy of twelve my limbs were not particularly strong and it required the full energy of body and arms in a constant up and down movement to keep the lead out of the danger-zone. Having the enthusiasm of youth, this young assistant would play the ecstatic music that swallowed up the wind at an inordinate pace, so that it became a contest as to whether my arms or the lead would win. Often the sweat dropped off my face on to the handle and my back and legs ached so much under the strain that I felt on the verge of collapse. Then a merciful drift into soft pedalling and my energies would revive for the next spasm. The trouble was that the organist was so enthralled with his own achievements that he was entirely oblivious to mine. He could wrestle for over an hour with Handel's 'Largo' or 'The Hallelujah Chorus' as if he wanted the pipes to burst their sides or the local inhabitants to be shaken from their beds. Then, by the time the school bell began to clang and I was pretty well exhausted, he would bring the performance to a close, pause, recollect my existence by suddenly shouting: 'You may go now, Garratt,' as if my having to run all the way to school was a natural sequence to the job. Most graciously he took the church key back to the verger. But this is only half the story. The choirmaster practised for an hour or more on two evenings of the week and was more moderate in his demands. He made an interval by eating an apple and found as much tonal delight in having two stops out of the organ as his assistant did in having twenty. But, oh, the tyranny of being shut up in the cell on hot summer evenings instead of playing cricket in the park and exercising my own vocal organs among the boys who enjoyed the freedom of the open air. I could often have burst out crying, as with sleeves rolled up and perspiration dripping from my cheeks, I thought how better I could hit the ball than could Johnny Williams, though he got all the practice.

How I hoped that every piece of music would be the last and that the declining rays of the sun would hold out until I could get out to play before bedtime. But having no watch to check the time I became convinced that the organist was exceeding the limit and that he didn't care a scrap about my interests. Then I grew tearful with anger and purposely let the wind out of the organ. This drew a rebuke which I pretended not to hear and gave the clue to how I was feeling. When the practice finished, my hopes of dashing to the park to share the tail-end of the game finished also, for I was too tired to do anything more than saunter home and bury my disappointment in sleep. During one grim summer's evening in the cell I frantically became poetic and scribbled on the wall:

To blow the organ  
Would be fun,  
In a world  
Without a sun.

I admit that my job of organ-blowing was not all sighs and sweat. But this was when I was allocated to the cell for the Sunday evening service instead of singing in the choir. The smiling eyes of little girls who came and sat near the curtain to play a game of bo-peep rewarded me. The cell took on arcadian charms as I was successful in arranging a trysting-place when the service was over.

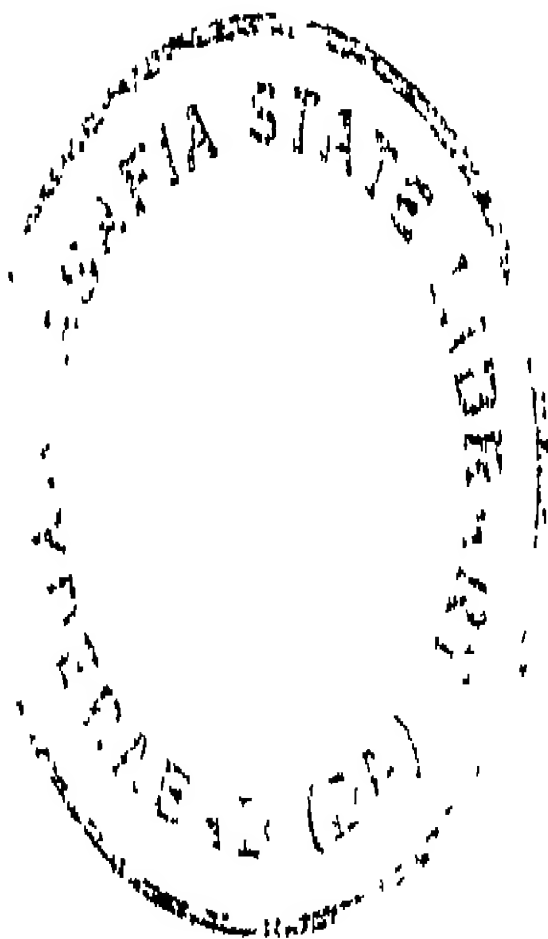
My next half-time job was at a small draper's in Bristol Road, where I acted as general boy for three shillings a week. Two maiden sisters managed the shop and supplied the means of sustenance to another sister (who suffered from deformity), and to the father, who was a stately old gentleman with flowing white beard and commanding voice. The 'old man' as I called him, would have been a more attractive figure had he not been continuously pushing snuff up his nose, for though most of it disappeared into some mysterious



*St. Asaph's Choir Outing*

I AM STANDING IMMEDIATELY IN FRONT OF PARSON BROWN





part of his cranium, the residue took up quarters in his beard and waistcoat and gave him a permanent autumnal tint. Daily I fetched him a supply from the tobacconist and had to be extremely careful to hand him the farthing change.

I arrived at the shop at seven-fifteen each morning to sweep the floor, dust the fittings, and wash the step. I became acquainted with the various types of corsets that enclosed feminine busts and the lace of mysterious underwear. My sex-lore was still in its infancy and I derived certain emotional thrills from the mental images they helped to create. The handling of artificial legs and torsos, however, had its limitation, and I had a hungry desire to convert them into flesh. The two sisters, of course, could have provided all the knowledge I required, but they didn't disclose the interesting parts of their anatomy. They came on the scene with high, laced collars that put their heads in a sort of flower-pot and had their skirts so long that all their climbing and bending revealed nothing. The shop taunted me out of my wits. How babies were born and the differing bodily structure of men and women I knew from the conversations of boys at school, but not to be able to see the actual curve of a woman's leg or the natural formation of her breasts was as tantalizing as to lift up an undraped dummy without life.

The only outlet for my youthful sex curiosity was on rainy days, when many a ladies' skirt would be raised (some more attractively than others) to display a flounce of white lace or pink flannelette, on which I could dote with all the reverence of a potential lover.

The evening job of delivering parcels in the residential district of Edgbaston gave me splendid opportunities. I recall those rainy autumnal nights, when my solitary little figure, with two or three parcels under its arms, penetrated those quiet roads, ghostly in the sombre light of gas-lamps that left long patches of gloom between dark hedgerows and open gates, when I heard with

palpitating heart the unmistakable sound of feminine footsteps in the rear and eased down my own till the lady had passed and I could follow her at a polite distance with my eyes riveted on her ankles and with a surging hope that the puddles would compel her to lift her skirts a little higher.

Leaving the draper's shop, I went into the domestic employ of the schoolmaster, whose two daughters corresponded to the two sisters of the former establishment. As there was no mother, the younger sister managed the home and was maid, cook, and mistress rolled into one. Her elder sister, however, had a different view of life, for she was always dressed up as a guest of honour and made dignified excursions into town. Sometimes they went out together with their attractive faces enveloped in veils and their flounced skirts lifted from the ground. The rude boys who chanted after them: 'They were only the schoolmaster's daughters,' gave them a loftier sense of their importance. They were most pleasant in the home and gave me bacon for breakfast on Saturday mornings, and in the cold weather really hot water with which to scrub the steps. What I did object to, was being addressed as 'boy,' as if I was not worthy of a name and far inferior to Jacky the canary and Tiddles the cat. Though the house was cramped, it had one architectural distinction in having the w.c. set among the scented blooms of a small greenhouse. I found that compartment more comfortable than the kitchen.

This half-time work which deprived me of so much recreation with other boys, was relieved during the school holidays, when my overburdened mother quickly formed half a dozen of us into a picnic party and packed us off for the day to Calthorpe Park. The party comprised an old wooden basinette that held my two youngest sisters and a small brother perched across the middle,

who enjoyed the privilege of kicking the sides of the chariot with his dangling feet, an elder sister and myself to push the handle, and another growing youngster who clung to my coat with a grim determination not to be left behind. That the springs of the vehicle were taxed to the utmost was declared by every revolution of the wheels, for having shed their rubber tyres they groaned out the pangs of senility with painful effects. But we were as indifferent to public criticism as we were to the possibility of the bottom falling out or the wheels crumpling up, for under spasms of reckless excitement we raced along like the Romans of old in full battle-cry to capture the favourite encampment that rival hosts would claim if we were not in the park in good time. Sometimes a split in the ranks hampered progress, for though we had no provisions that fully squared with our appetites, we carried emergency rations in the form of a huge bottle of cold tea and three slices of bread and lard each, which caused the dissension. Not to touch these rations until a stated time was the parental order—an order we tried to enforce by the simple process of watching one another's movements. If one were discovered chewing before his time a chorus of disapproval held up the expedition and the offender was summarily dealt with by a good shaking or slapping. When peace was restored, the charioteers dashed through the park gates for the favourite piece of turf on which to fix up headquarters. The strategic nature of the position was decided by the public tennis-courts, for they gave my brother and me first chance to hop over the railings and get the job of ball-boys as soon as the players appeared. Though rival aspirants came up and threatened to 'punch our noses' for being first, we risked the issue in favour of the coppers we earned. Too rarely, however, was the whole tribe of us able to raid the refreshment-room for penny bars of cream chocolate.

Our picnics were made up of acrobatics over the palings, gambols on the grass, games with an improvised

ball made up of old stockings, vigorous rough and tumbles that were bound to end in tears, much slapping and kissing and threats to 'tell mamma about you,' risky skirmishes over the tennis-courts, warnings by the 'parky' with the big stick, quarrels with neighbouring tribes that shouted rude remarks, violent protests against any one taking too long a drink from the tea-bottle, an opposite condition of rivalry to drink the most when the bottle was filled with water, the sudden scare that we had exceeded our time, and finally the grand striking of camp and the re-loading of the chariot for the procession homeward. And what ravenous appetites we all had. I often thought of the scriptural story of manna falling from the skies and why it didn't come when we most wanted it. Perhaps it had reference only to the savoury dinners being cooked in the well-to-do homes on the Bristol Road, for there was no escaping the attractive odours that made us peer into the windows with envious eyes. It was a settled custom to stop at a certain confectioner's shop and to press our noses against the window with vain regrets that the tarts and cakes on the other side were not more easily acquired. Not that the shop entirely lacked our custom, for when an odd coin was available I went in (the chariot and all, nearly, as well), and asked for a ha'peth of undercounter, please,' which resulted in the good lady scooping into my cap a few saucerfuls of odds and ends of cake, much of which was too stale to bite. But the waiting throng received me gladly and after a most difficult distribution, found a useful purpose for every crumb. The general rule, however, was to go straight home, straight to the bread and dripping waiting for us, then straight to bed.

But not straight to the boon of sleep. If this is to be a true record, unpleasant aspects from which I am tempted to shrink shall not be omitted. The scourge of vermin has wrecked too many homes to be ignored, while to thousands of children it still remains a hideous nightmare. In a crowded home such as ours the preval-

ence of bugs and fleas was inevitable. Once entrenched in the straw mattresses and walls and floorboards, it was beyond the wit of the best of mothers to save us from them. So we submitted to the attack every night—the fleas biting our bodies with cruel persistency and raising large white lumps. What long, long hours of torment we endured. To be huddled up together without the freedom to scratch and to be denied the normal process of sleep by the constant fidgeting that went on made bed-time a dreaded rather than a pleasant affair. The only escape was to get to sleep before the pests emerged from their hiding-places, for once they started to draw blood there was little chance of sinking off until sheer exhaustion arrived. Sometimes the little brutes were so busy fattening on my body that I managed to catch them in the act and squeeze them to death between my fingers as I lay smarting from their bites. In the winter they made a favourite nesting-ground of the thick woolly blanket, on which I made surprise raids in the day-time and found a gruesome delight in squeezing them between my thumb-nails and feeling the blood they had sucked during the night spurt on to my face. To find them entrapped without a chance to hop away seemed a just Nemesis on the powers that be for giving them such agile feet to carry out their nefarious work.

Verminous heads were also a horror with which my mother had to contend. In those days there was not the supervision of schoolchildren in matters of cleanliness that there is at present, and the custom of wearing long hair easily communicated vermin from one child to another. In fact, my mother was almost driven frantic by the state of my sisters' heads, for in the hot weather they had to be tooth-combed daily, when the pests rattled down on to a newspaper, before crackling in the fire, into which they were bundled. But the greatest ignomy was to have them detected crawling over my coat-collar by other schoolchildren while I sat at lessons, and to be called 'lousy.' Not being able to

dispute the fact, I had to sit through the taunts with the blood rushing to my cheeks in utter shame.

Killing fleas at once leads me to another form of slaughter that disturbed my early years. At the back of a butcher's shop I passed on the way to school was an open slaughter-house, where twice a week the killing was done in full view of any one who cared to see. I was introduced to the place by another little boy who was too frightened to go up the yard and gaze by himself, so we both went timidly together. I shared some of his fright when I saw two butchers in blue overalls and heavy boots wallowing in blood and whistling their way through their horrible work. It was horrible to me because I had never pictured sheep outside the setting of green meadows and the local parks, and to hear them scuttling with fright when the butchers grabbed a victim gave me an unpleasant feeling of life's insecurity. But I felt worse when one of the butchers forced down the sheep's head while the other plunged a pointed knife into its neck until it showed through the lower side. As the blood poured into the gully below, the sheep kicked and struggled for a few seconds till the breath of life faded from its body and its head hung limp. The butchers then cut away the skin and hooked the carcass alongside others near the wall with the blood still dripping from its mouth. The sickly stench of the yard should have driven us away but we stood there while sheep after sheep was killed and blood poured into the drains and the butchers' cheerfulness began to make us think that it was the most natural thing in the world for sheep to be slaughtered in this way. In another shed was a cow with its head drawn practically to the ground by a rope that was tied tightly to an iron ring. I shrink from relating how this animal was killed.

My first glimpse of the Warwickshire countryside was from the carriage windows of a train that swept

hundreds of excited children from dismal courtyards to the open fields for one glorious summer's day. This outing was worthy of anticipation, for I had to save up my Saturday ha'pennies to help to buy the railway ticket and to have sixpence to spend. As each day brought the day of days nearer I watched the skies with a supplicating hope that the sun knew all about the party and would take good care that we were blessed with fine weather. How readily I went to bed the night before the event, well knowing I was too excited to sleep, but oh, so anxious to impress mother with my inherent goodness and as being worthy of the few extra coppers that would come from her purse the next day! If I went to sleep at all, I was certainly awake unusually early and more concerned about the sun coming into the room than usual, and positively more joyful in being out of bed and dressed than usual, just as the brothers and sisters who were also going were much more pleasant to one another than usual. Breakfast we ate with difficulty. Much easier was it to receive the warnings: 'Not to put our heads out of the carriage windows,' 'Not to loose hands when crossing the road,' and 'Not to spend our money all at once,' for swift promises to obey did not necessarily include the obligation to carry them out. We started off holding one another's hands and met other little children in party dress and with parcels of food, as if all the roads led to St James's School, where every one assembled. And how my overjoyed heart beat when I saw the uniformed bandsmen outside and the big drum waiting in the roadway surrounded by a number of boys bold enough to give it a resounding punch. Then, with our tickets tucked safely in our deepest pockets (for this was the only passport to the tea), we formed into a long procession, skirmished to get near the band, and with flags waving and eyes sparkling, marched off to the beat of the drum.

What a magical attraction there is in a band! To me it was wonderful, and as the cheeks of some of the



musicians rose under their energy so my emotional temperature rose also, for never had I heard such air-splitting sounds as were blared out of those instruments as we passed between the rows of small houses. But there were quiet passages in the music when I thought the bandsmen were tiring of their job or not making the occasion sufficiently impressive. And then I became visibly subdued. But how different I looked when the bandsmen decided to pull their weight and compel man and beast to take notice of our approach. If I scanned the eyes of people rushing to the doors, it was to let them know that I had a share in the banging of the drum and the boom of the big bassoon. I also derived satisfaction in the knowledge that St Asaph's never had a band for their parties and that our turnout must have been the envy of all boys and girls who had not the good fortune to belong to our Sunday School.

At Five Ways station a special train drew up for us and we clambered in as if fifty could get into a carriage. Then we all struggled to get near the window and fought one another for corner seats. Calm was restored by the portly vicar thrusting his beaming face near the glass and expanding it in smiling appreciation of the fact that we had not fallen out the other side, for I heard him ask a porter if all the doors were locked. Gliding out of the station we immediately entered a tunnel and showed our courage in the darkness by a disorderly outbreak of shouting and jumping about. Then we seemed to be riding on the roofs of houses, just missing lines of chimney-pots, till eventually we got level with the earth again and ran among fields and meadows.

Released from the train we soon made a picture of happy childhood. After games the tea. Under an immense marquee we sat at tables that seemed to have no end and received a bag of eatables in return for the ticket. And if our heads nearly disappeared into the bags it was to make a deep scrutiny of their contents and to inform one another of our superior luck. Two

'doormats' of bread and butter, a monster scone and a slice of cake seemed a fair compliment to our appetite and was duly returned long before the tea came round. But come it did and for the want of a nobler motive I immediately entered into competition with Reg Walker on the opposite side of the table to drink most cups of tea. Fortunately the teacher whom we harried to keep up supplies would cheerfully have allowed us to overflow, had not a natural disturbance compelled us to call it a draw. Then we went out and finished off my sixpence pocket-money at the ice-cream stall—the last transaction of halfpennies with long intervals between. Sucking away at the ice-cream, Reg and I agreed that it was the best 'blow-out' we had ever had.

The return journey was a different affair from the boisterous excitement of the morning. With our faces tinged by the sun and our pockets bulging with the orange given to us as a parting blessing, and with our grubby little fingers clutching a few wild flowers as evidence of the country visit, we lifted tired limbs into the train and silently watched the day slipping into twilight and the trees and fields become half golden under the setting sun. And if some of us slept before we reached New Street station I am sure it was to dream that our feet were still among the flowers and that we could hear the song of the birds under an eternal summer's sky.

As most of these Sunday School parties were substantially alike, the only memorable incident worth reviving occurred in the park at Sutton Coldfield. Here the donkeys ran their riders round a pool and back to the starting point, without any directing. The track at one end of the pool was unfortunately narrow, and having strayed to this point on the day in question, without being aware of its danger, I suddenly heard galloping feet and was horrified to see a boy and a mule hurtling round as if it were Tattenham Corner. Before I could decide on any movement I was knocked flat on

my stomach and felt the animal and rider pass over my back as they continued the journey as if nothing had happened. I got up unhurt. The proud boast of being run over by a donkey lasted as long as no one suggested that I was the more foolish of the two.

Before the advent of cheap travel, few working-class families ever thought of an annual holiday. There were certainly no pleasant anticipations of holiday-making in our home, though my brother and I had the good fortune to spend a fortnight at Portsmouth before either of us had left school. The Boer War was over and the heroes of military fame dropped out in favour of my sailor uncle, who was now a naval instructor at Eastney and to whose government cottage on the sea-front we journeyed one summer's day. The first thrill was to pass the sentry, for as 'Ivy Cottage' was on marine ground it came under the same protection as the barrack buildings. The long bayonet sticking out of the sentry's rifle was rather frightening and I was glad to find that my uncle seemed on good terms with him. In fact, he was so cheerful and amiable to every sailor we met, that no Admiral of the Fleet could have given me greater pride in blood relationship. His romantic figure of former years had now an added glory, for besides having a braided uniform and a broad chest he was identified with all the naval interests of Portsmouth. With the freshness and buoyancy known only to seamen he took us over the various barracks and among sailors who filled us up with lemonade and showed such good humour about everything that I thought what a good family party we could have if they had been uncles as well. But the finest adventure was to be taken over the naval dockyards and over every class of warship that happened to be in dock. The first dreadnought was then being built and we went down into the hold and saw how the massive steel plates were riveted together while our uncle answered a thousand and one questions as we made the pilgrimage from stem to stern. Of the

warships in commission the most noticeable feature was their scrupulous cleanliness. In the men's quarters we received an extraordinary welcome from jolly Jack Tars who sat feasting on cocoa and slabs of bread and butter at long wooden tables. Someone said: 'Give the youngsters a swig,' and half a dozen mugs of steaming cocoa were offered us at the same time.

As our holiday coincided with the Hayling Island regatta, my uncle and a sailor friend decided to row us over in a small boat to spend the day there. This was our first journey on the sea. Arriving at the island, my brother and I were given the freedom to roam about and the strict instruction to be back at the harbour by 7 p.m. to make the return journey. What we did during the afternoon was to ignore the regatta in favour of coconut shies and to eat as many buns as we could afford at tea. When we returned to the harbour there was no sign of uncle or of the boat we came in, so we concluded that we had misunderstood the instructions and had been left behind. Inquiries about two men in a boat helped us little, and as the prospect of spending a night in the police station loomed up and as the sun went down we became alarmed and learnt that the only way of getting back to Portsmouth was to catch the last ferry-boat at a point about three miles further round the coast. Not having any time to lose we stepped off to walk the distance. It was now twilight and we had no knowledge of tides or the coastline, but we pressed on, stumbling over dead fish, stones, and scattered timber. With the jetty lights in view we panted along that last lap in a desperate race with time, hoping that the captain of the boat could see us. Gasping for breath we dashed down the landing-stage just as the bells were sounding and were flung on deck. We lay with faces like watered tomatoes and our hearts pounding like the engines. We arrived to find my aunt very distressed and learnt that uncle and his companion were making a midnight return to Hayling Island in search of his

erring nephews. We were awakened next morning by the two mariners anxiously demanding the full story. I derived from that holiday a stirring sense of nautical importance and afterwards could not tolerate school-boys telling me anything about ships and life on the ocean wave.

My mother's despairing remarks as the summer holidays approached indicated only too well the worry we gave her during this period. Fortunately, the kindly Mrs C. observed her difficulty and probably thinking that my brother and I were the most troublesome of the family arranged to send us into the country for a fortnight, free of cost. As this happened for a number of years, the early impressions I got of the beautiful Warwickshire lanes and landscape have lured me back time and again. We were sent to Langley, a tiny village that lies on the threshold of the Shakespeare country. Dressed in best knickerbocker-suits and carrying a well-stocked tin trunk between us we set out in Copperfield fashion for Snow Hill station and entrained for Claverdon, where a Mr Carter was to meet us. And first let me give thanks for that delightful little country station with its colourful flower-beds and arching bridge and the healthy-looking station-master in gold-braided hat who welcomed the train as he would a friend that never failed to keep an appointment. As we happened to be the only two passengers interested in Claverdon, he also welcomed us, and with a benign countenance not common on the railways asked whether we were the two lads bound for Langley.

'You 'll find Mr Carter awaiting ye outside,' he assured us as he took the tickets.

We trundled our luggage through the open gates and came face to face with a little pony and trap and old Mr Carter, who was fumbling with the reins and mumbling jargon to nothing in particular. Well over

the allotted span of three score years and ten, he looked a typical veteran of the soil in his white smock and broad straw hat, under which his face shone with all the radiance of the rising sun, surrounded with spreading rays of whiskers.

'Be ye the masters from Brummagum?' he drawled out when he saw us standing like visitors at a menagerie.

'Are you Mr Carter?' I asked in reply.

He hesitated for a moment as if to recollect his identity, and then said: 'I be 'e,' as he set the reins for immediate departure, pushed the tin trunk under the seat, and intimated that the rest of the cargo could fix itself. The next moment the pony was jolting us up the hill with Mr Carter waving a wand of a whip like a presiding fairy and myself clinging to the side of the vehicle and to the impression that the shafts would break in two. Soon we were trotting along a country lane banked by scented hedgerows and colourful gardens of little thatched cottages, at the doors of which dear old faces appeared to investigate the purpose of our host's visit to the station. Serene and restful under summer skies, I could not imagine conditions more suitable for old folk, who looked as happy and contented as if they were going to live on for ever. Mr Carter himself certainly showed no signs of immediate decay. At the top of the hill was a blacksmith's shop, with a doorway the shape of a horseshoe, in which the glow of the sparking fire lit up the perspiring face of the village blacksmith before he clanged the anvil on behalf of the horse waiting to be shod. Round the bend we skirted the old church and decaying grave-stones and heard the rooks cawing in and out of the belfrey. Then we cantered along a winding lane that rose and dipped between pleasant pastures and showed fields of ripening corn in the sunlight. Occasionally the rich smell of a farmyard filled my nostrils and gave me the happy feeling that we were getting deeper and deeper into the country. Eventually we arrived at a little cottage that stood at right angles to the lane

at the entrance to the village of Langley and were met by a buxom old woman under a sun-bonnet, whose round face resolved into a score of wrinkles as she beamed on her two young visitors and then on the steaming pony which she patted and addressed with affection.

'They be theer all right, then,' said Mrs Carter, as if to confirm that we had actually arrived.

'Ay, mam, and bain't waste time in takin' 'em in,' hinted Mr Carter, as he took off his hat and mopped his forehead with a spotted red handkerchief.

'Bring yer box inside, and I'll get ye some vittal.'

This remark by Mrs Carter produced a glance of mutual astonishment between her guests as we followed her portly figure into the house, for though I had a hazy idea of having seen the word 'victuals' in print, I had never heard it in usage before, and wondered what lay in store for us. As it happened to be an appetizing raspberry pudding that came to the brim of a monster basin, my ignorance gave way to the hope that the word would be freely used in the days to come. It was. Delicious Langley ham for breakfast, English beef and garden vegetables for dinner, and home-made bread and cake and honey for tea, supplemented by 'Carter's Special Elderberry Wine' and bread and cheese before going to bed. Good wholesome country food that helped to bring the bloom to our cheeks and vitality to our bodies.

Pear-tree Cottage had all the amenities that town boys could desire. A huge pear-tree, which stood at the garden gate, sent down sufficient fruit to give us many a tummyache. The cottage itself was old and quaint and had a pleasant musty smell as of decaying wood. A crazy chimney ran up the outside of the gable wall as if it was an after-thought of the builder and connected with an old fashioned fireplace set in a comfortable recess. But that builder understood village life, for in the recess he had put a small look-out window that gave full view

of passers-by and of the lane leading into the village. In an arm-chair that had the sanctity of a throne, Mrs Carter spent much time at this observation post and followed the movements of man and animal with the utmost interest.

'There be Gilbert a-startin' fer Stratford.'

'Elsie's late with them baistes to-day; that gal will come to no' good.'

'That 's Ben a-goin' up to cut 'is oats,' and similar items of news she served up to everybody or nobody during the course of the day. In fact, her old bent back at that little window seemed as fundamental as the ticking of the grandfathers' clock or the singing of the huge kettle that stood on the hob. The low-raftered ceiling smelt of whitewash and was adorned by a number of hooks on which the hams were strung in that golden age of heavy feeding. Tall people must have had a difficult time in those days. On the walls hung a number of photographs of the twelve children reared by the Carters, which showed how the fighting and farming services had been strengthened by the male section and the family-tree considerably broadened out by the female. To hear Mrs Carter relate the life and adventures of her scattered offspring was to listen to an odyssey of extraordinary detail. The next room was a mixture of scullery and storehouse for all the good things that cheered our appetites. From its mysterious corners came the smell of strawberries and luscious fruit and the precious home-made wine which our host asserted was 'the baist in the village.' The stairs were a monument of graceful decay and dangerous design. On one side there was no protection against our toppling over and being precipitated among the baskets below, while the softest tread resulted in a symphony of creaks. Our small bedroom was immediately at the top and, though sleeping near the cavity of the stairway darkly excited the imagination, the smell of antiquity gave a comfortable feeling of security. What disturbed me most was a



funny-shaped basket that hung from the ceiling at the foot of our bed, for in the dead of night I could hear the insects beating up against it as if they were trying to bring it down. This trifling fear for the first few nights kept me awake for hours. The sounds of the old couple locking up for the night were a pleasanter distraction. I lay awake to hear the exchange of confidences at the foot of the stairs and then to see the reflections of the candlelight dance on the ceiling as they made the slow ascent into our room where their old, kindly faces came near to ours, and Mrs Carter would say: 'They be fast asleep, master,' without noticing a half-open eye peeping above the bed-clothes. When they disappeared into their own small room and were soon silent in sleep, I thought of the simple life of this devoted couple who had shared each other's joys and griefs for over half a century, and asked no more of the world than the peace and quiet of the countryside and the happiness of passing into the eventide together like a single star vanishing into the night.

To town-dwellers few joys can equal that of waking at dawn in an old country cottage, stepping out into the fresh scented air and the calm of the springing life around, and feeling the harmony of man, bird, and beast. Then to plunge one's face into a basin of cold water direct from the stream and feel the exhilaration of it trickling down the spine of one's back. Oh, the benison of cold water!

'Vittals be ready,' called out Mrs Carter and down we sat to a breakfast of cold boiled ham, honey, and bread and butter. No dainty thin slices for us, but hearty chunks that defied a second helping. And how Mr Carter's jaws fascinated me as they worked up and down like a grinding-machine. I could never see any teeth, but he attacked the food with vicious enthusiasm and declared that his digestion 'be as good as any yon bullocks.' His wife had a good digestion of a more general kind for she kept bobbing up and down to squint through the little window of the observation post. By the

amount we ate, the digestion of her young guests needed no further comment. After breakfast we enjoyed the freedom of the estate that, for a small cottage, was not only unusually large but also well-suited for boyish taste. The first part comprised the strawberry beds surrounded by raspberry- and gooseberry-bushes heavy with fruit. Then came the vegetable plot where every day potatoes were dug from the rich soil and peas or beans were plucked. Further down the sloping path-way was the orchard, where apples, pears, and plums weighted down the branches to a convenient height and enabled us to stock our pockets with a wonderful assortment and pass out into an adjoining field unobserved by the eagle eyes of Mrs Carter. Though we could have satisfied our wants from the stock indoors, alas for juvenile morality, stolen fruit always seemed to taste better than that legitimately acquired. In this part of the garden was also a little streamlet of fresh water that flowed from a pipe in the embankment and on the hot days we bared our bodies and splashed about like dryads on a desolate shore. But having the shame of Adam in our bones we took fright and hid behind the apple-trees as soon as our hostess (and her familiar basket) was seen coming in our direction. A pleasant occupation for Mr Carter was that of making tip-cats for our enjoyment. This game, which seems to have gone out of fashion, was played by tipping up a short piece of wood, tapered at the ends, with a thick stick, and hitting it the longest possible distance. The pastime was popular in the Birmingham streets, but as it found most favour from glaziers of broken windows, offended householders called for its suppression. In the quiet lanes of Langley, however, the game led to no greater discomfort than a periodical search for the tip-cat among the thick hedgerows or in the depths of half-hidden ditches. And Mr Carter was the hero of each occasion. It roused his adventurous spirit to make good our loss and he would spend most of the morning pushing his old body

into entanglements or remote undergrowth to recover the treasure. Always kindly and patient in making us happy he took a lively interest in our games and showed how childhood and age could be housemates still.

Another excitement was to be in at the cutting of the corn when the farmer and all his family engaged in a rabbit-hunt by taking up positions round the field with the object of driving the rodents into the middle as the cutting-machine narrowed down the margin of escape. Armed with sticks especially prepared for us by Mr Carter, we spied our prey with all the keenness of big-game hunters and shared in the hue and cry when a rabbit broke through the cordon and was seen scampering over the stubble and into the sanctuary of the hedge. My nearest approach to success was when I managed to hit an escaping prisoner on the back and set his little legs kicking in the air, but as I was too frightened to do anything more, it suddenly got up and ran off, as if laughing at my timidity. If the harvesting was being done by a Mr Bateman, there was extra amusement by seeing his eighteen-stone body poised on the little round seat of the machine and his huge red face (from which he derived the nickname 'Jupiter'), haloed by a broad-brimmed hat that attracted an army of flies. Perched aloft, Jupiter could see the rabbits scuttling into the corn as the machine went round and periodically he would stop his horse, jump up from his seat, and excitedly shout in a high-pitched voice: 'E'yar, theer be a fattun for ye rollin' pin,' and nearly topple off his throne. But the cutting-machine was more fascinating than its owner. The way it drew in the corn to be cut by the moving knives, and then carried it up the revolving canvas before automatically tying it into sheaves and flinging it out, seemed a marvel of mechanical ingenuity. The stacking of the sheaves into small groups towards sundown gave us a better chance to exhibit our talent as potential farmers, and to perspire in a competitive struggle to cover the most ground.

Those summer evenings among the smelling corn and under the glow of a western sun; when the harvesters gathered, tired and happy, to rest after the day's toil, and the steaming horse was patted by grateful hands, before being led away to share in the calm and repose that settled over the whole countryside, stand out in my memory like a Constable's painting to be enjoyed in quiet moments of meditation.

On other days we paddled in the brook that crossed the lane or tramped across the fields to Claverdon Church with the unavailing resolve to pull the bell. The sanctity of the old churchyard, with its stones whose inscriptions took us down the centuries, kept us good little boys and fully eligible to go tiptoeing into the building with cap in hand and subdued whispers to read the chronology of departed souls and to discuss whether the bats ever came down to the service or got in the way of the swinging bell. Then we peeped into the vestry, mounted the few steps into the pulpit and solemnly crept up to the altar rails to compare the size of the chancel with that of St Asaph's. And how the sanctified silence of that old country church almost commanded a reverence for its walls and time-worn pews to which the simple village-folk of bygone ages had gathered in simple worship and lifted their voices in praise and thanksgiving for the earth's response to their daily toil. We thought of the services of the previous Sunday, and stopped in the porch to see how much had been collected. The amount seemed surprisingly small. Going back over the fields we heard the church clock strike and wondered why we had not dared to pull the rope of the bell.

The following Sunday we put on our best suits and tramped to the morning service. As promoted choir-boys of a much larger church our critical faculties were very much alive to the quality of singing we expected to hear and before the first hymn had ended were thoroughly convinced that we could teach those country boys something if we only had the chance. To us they

sounded flatter than St Asaph's bell, and to indicate the efficiency of our own musical talent my brother and I exchanged significant squints whenever the discords were particularly bad. This had the effect of diverting our interest to Farmer Bailey's young daughters on the other side of the aisle, for their eyes were as dazzling as their satins and ribbons and we were positive they could sing in tune. Being with their father, our glances were never returned and I felt a resentment against him for not staying away. Another discomfort was the length of the sermon. Later on we visited a tiny church a few miles away and learnt for the first time of that ecclesiastical anomaly by which a minister can be paid a handsome stipend and enjoy a palatial rectory for looking after a handful of parishioners. Remembering the enormous parish of St Asaph's Church and the obviously moderate incomes of its ministers it seemed as if luck played a part in the calling.

When pocket-money arrived we undertook the tramp to Stratford-on-Avon. Our aim was to see Shakespeare's house, but when we asked directions from an old crone in the market-place she looked astonished and finally told us to 'go up yon street and ask the copper.' As there was no 'copper' to be found we judged that the ancient house that had not been converted into a shop and that seemed to be entirely ignored by the people in general, must be the place. It was, disappointingly confirmed by the notice that a charge was made to go in. What, pay to see Shakespeare's house! How do they expect poor children to pay for everything that happens to be interesting to them? If they wouldn't let us inside the house, they could at least have made it a little more thrilling by having a band outside or a few flags flying from the roof. To peep through the windows might lead the people to think we wanted to break in, and as no one in Stratford showed any excitement about the birthplace of the world's greatest genius, our best

plan was to view it from a distance for a few minutes in silent admiration, and then to go and find his burial place in the church.

If gently-flowing waters can be expressive of reverence as it passes hallowed ground, and its unending presence remindful of the eternal greatness of work that has been achieved, then the Avon fulfils both these functions as it glides past the church at Stratford. It is good to have a river linked with the memory of a great man, for though all else vanishes, the desecrater's hand must stop short at the water's edge. And how fitting that the church should be right up to the banks and that a moist ground should sustain the life and beauty of those wonderful memorial trees! Indeed, the whole place breathes harmony and one has only to imagine the fate that would have befallen a Shakespeare born in a modern industrial town, wherein a murky, massive column would have been the chief memorial attraction.

Such were our thoughts as we sat on the churchyard wall, gazing at the waters and then at the sombre sycamore-trees that looked like sentinels of mourning. Not content to move until we turned ourselves giddy by trying to look up the high church steeple, we eventually bared our heads and very solemnly entered the building and walked up the aisle to the chancel steps to ponder over the grave of Shakespeare and the advantage the choirboys had in singing in such an atmosphere. And after we had inspected everything that could be seen without a charge, we wandered into a little low-roofed house and had a modest tea and a talk about the glories of Stratford. Then we started the long tramp back to Langley with a tale to unfold and a firm resolve to impress the more unfortunate schoolboys with our richer experience as soon as we returned to Birmingham.

These records cover the period up to 1905, when I attained my thirteenth birthday. The orgy that followed

the relief of Mafeking was still vivid in memory, for every street blazoned with bunting, and bonfires and mass hysteria surged up in wild and reckless revelry. For once, my mother laughed and appeared really happy, but when the embers died out and the legacy of excessive drinking made homes more miserable than they were before, I began to dislike this form of public rejoicing. But there was more to come. A man who lived in a nearby court was returning with the C.I.V.'s, after an absence of two years' service in the Boer War, and the whole street prepared to give him the welcome befitting to a public hero. Flags and streamers linked up every window, and excitement ran high when the news flashed round that the hero had arrived. Presently he came like the Sultan of Turkey, mounted on a chair, with the South African sun beaming from under a broad-brimmed hat and crowds of people jostling and joking and cheering him along in a mad frenzy of delight. I was among the drummer-boys who tapped tin-cans and marched to patriotic singing but was finally put to bed in tears because I could not join further in the festivities. Soon after the celebrations the hero became an ordinary man again who received only ordinary notice from the same people who had cheered him, which made me wonder whether he was a hero after all.

It is not surprising that in crowded areas where life is stifled into uniformity, the people rush to every excuse for an outburst of emotion. Individual development has little chance in hovels where all conversation can be heard by the next-door neighbour and local opinion sits in judgment on every movement. I recall the whispering and the tittle-tattle of our own home and how the natural inclinations of people were continually checked. Of course, the conditions were chiefly to blame. Since, as I have related, a single water-tap served the whole court, and half a dozen families used the same w.c., to use the wash-house meant conforming to a rota, and as the weekly cleansing of these public offices was done by

neighbourly arrangement, there was always sufficient scope for gossip and irritating interference that often developed into a row. A row was like a declaration of war that mobilized opposing forces immediately. All the pent-up venom of personal abuse that women could hurl against one another was let forth like a salvo of howitzers which struck at feminine susceptibilities and often resulted in a hand to hand fight. Then the husbands, coming home from a hard day's work, were drawn into the quarrel or if they refused to take part their wives fell foul of them—would even oblige them to reopen hostilities if these had ceased—until at last the police arrived to restore peace. Much of the quarrelling was the direct outcome of drink, for there was nothing like intoxication for bringing to the surface the hates and spite which lurked under apparent friendship. In fact, ninety per cent of the misery of family life could be traced to this same cause.

Practically every street had its public-house, in which men sat the whole of the evening drinking, arguing, smoking, and swearing, finding the atmosphere more congenial than the dismal surroundings of their homes. They tramped out at closing time in all states of inebriation and kept up a brawling chatter till after midnight, when they wandered home sour or stupid to quarrel with their wives and put terror in the hearts of children. On Saturday nights the rowdyism was more intense on account of more drunkenness, and street fighting and domestic rows often put the neighbourhood in a state of uproar. The wealthy brewers, who, at the first signs of any State interference with their trade, bellowed: 'Why rob the working-man of his glass of beer?' took good care not to picture these 'blessings' on the hoardings.

The public-house was also the breeding ground for rival gangs of roughs. They were composed of 'Peaky Blinders,' who wore long-peaked caps and wide, bell-bottomed trousers which tapered towards the knees. A line of vivid brass buttons down the front gave added



distinction. The relations between these gangs and the police were never very cordial, and it required little provocation for a pitched battle to flare up after a Saturday night's drinking bout. Policemen's whistles brought hundreds of people rushing to the scene and while belts and knuckle-dusters caused blood to flow freely, women and children ran about screaming and wild confusion prevailed until the gangsters were arrested. Sometimes a policeman was killed, and on one occasion a man was given a heavy sentence for kicking a constable's helmet, the judge remarking that it was no fault of the prisoner that a head was not in it. But if these clashes injured the reputation of the district, they certainly helped the newspaper proprietors, for a special Sunday edition was shouted round the streets, which excited as much interest as the bells of the fire brigade.

Other established Sunday institutions were the hot-muffin man, who chanted his wares in a white apron and seasoned straw hat, and the vendor of periwinkles, who provided a slimy-looking reptile from a shell. Familiar figures who also enlivened the streets in those days included an Italian with a musical-box, who ground out mournful melodies with one hand and beat a drum and cymbals with the other. The little monkey that sat on the box always assured him a crowd of children. Then came the man with the bear, a furtive-looking monster that gambolled in the road and danced round with a pole while its owner sang a ditty. A more attractive entertainment was that of a contortionist troupe who appeared in highly-coloured tights. And finally, came dusky minstrels in straw hats and tropical trousers, who made a plantation of the street by strumming on the banjo and serenading the 'darkies' in song and dance. When they came to collect the pennies, I used to stand and wonder why their teeth were not as black as their faces.

These flashes of excitement helped to bring a little brightness to dull surroundings. Seldom could my

overworked mother find relief from the cares of the home, and as her physical resources dwindled, so she had to rely on the domestic help of we elder children. Thus I was able to make beds, scrub the floors, blacklead the grate, clean the windows, and even cook a dinner before I entered my teens. But the most important job was that of helping to wash the clothes. As nothing went to the laundry, a colossal task was undertaken by my mother every week, in conditions that certainly helped to shorten her life. My contribution was to light the copper fire in the wretched little wash-house with the open windows, and to keep it going with buckets of 'slack' that I fetched from the dark regions of the cellar. Then I 'maided' the clothes (a term used for stamping them with a 'dolly' in a tub), while my mother scrubbed away at the sink in clouds of steam, the draught from the paneless window rushing against her perspiring face. Hour after hour she worked at those steaming tubs, lifting stacks of heavy clothes and sheets in and out of the copper, and exhausting her body till violent coughing compelled her to rest before carrying on again. Then I would help her in the tiring process of wringing all the clothes by hand, carrying them into the house, and finally in cleaning out the wash-house with the scrupulousness demanded by neighbourly opinion. It was often near midnight before my mother could close the door on that hideous death-trap. But clothes have to be dried, and if rainy conditions prevented them being hung outside, they had to be strung on lines inside the living-room. And what a horror this was to the peace and comfort of family life. With the dripping clothes making it more difficult to sit or move about and with my father, counting on some miraculous process of finding it all cleared away before he got home, contesting his irritability against the jaded nerves of my mother, it was more comforting to roam the streets or to go to bed early. The amount of ironing was reduced by sending a basket full of the heavy articles to a neighbour's

mangling machine, the cost being slightly lessened if I went with them to turn the handle.

Saturday was an institutional day and had a peculiar atmosphere of its own. Clad in a rough guerdon apron, I was kept busy all the morning on domestic work—scrubbing, dusting, and polishing, until my knees were sore. Then, when the factory hooters sounded at one o'clock and children ran to escort good-natured fathers to sweet- and toy-shops, we thought of our Saturday ha'penny, to be given grudgingly when my father returned home. To meet him in the street was purgatory, for his only talk was criticism of our faults and a tyrannical insistence on our acting against natural inclination. The fault that he said would lead to my eternal ruin was a slight turning-in of the toes, and he made a fetish of continually watching my feet to see that they were turned out at the correct angle. If I was unfortunate enough to be walking with him, I had to rehearse the act by walking on in front and then be harangued and threatened for the awkward display arising from embarrassment. Hence, I hated to be in his presence and used to dodge up entries and behind carts to keep out of his sight. And when to this conduct is added his opposition to any form of sport, reading (if I was caught with a book, he invariably snatched it from my hand), and to any sensible activity that was pleasurable and instructive to a boy's outlook on life, there was little encouragement for the growth of that filial love and devotion which children are proverbially supposed to render to the most indifferent parents.

But what boy with a sporting instinct of any worth could be kept away from cricket? Whenever possible I stole to Calthorpe Park to see the Saturday afternoon games between teams that attracted a big circle of supporters. Johnny Williams favoured the Speedwell Club, not only because the players were good sluggers (we never affected to call them sloggers), but chiefly because

they turned out in clean flannels and were looked upon as the 'Yorkshire Team' of the parks. As to their being good sluggers, he was certainly right, for some of the batsmen swiped at every ball and sent it sailing over the heads of the spectators and into the unknown, from whence it was returned to the inner circle by outpost fieldsmen, who could neither see the wickets nor the game. But Speedwell and Johnny Williams were far too cocky for me, so I preferred to champion the Kingsley team, whose players could not boast of spotless flannels and swagger caps, though they knew how to play cricket. And how excited I was when the Speedwell men were bowled out and how quickly subdued when their lanky captain made a 'stand' and mighty hits for sixes which vexed me to tears when Johnny laughed at my calling them lucky flukes! If the match was evenly contested I hung on every stroke of the Kingsley batsmen with anxiety and a run round to headquarters to squint over the scorer's shoulder to be assured that Kingsley wanted only so many more runs to win. On the results of those matches depended whether I was going home a disappointed little wretch or an exultant supporter of 'the best team on the parks,' with my thoughts brimming over with Maxwell's splendid boundaries and Speedwell's 'rotten bowling.' If Kingsley won, I joyfully perused the analysis of the game in the evening newspaper, but suspended all interest in local cricket if they lost. I record this shameful bias as a warning to other boys.

On Saturday night I generally accompanied my mother to the Birmingham rag market, intent on the adventurous quest for bargains in that vast lumber-room of odds and ends, smoke and smells. To the multitudes that promenaded between the stalls with a constant vigilance for articles that were going cheap, and with a tolerant submission to all the 'verbal bludgeoning' of salesmen and auctioneers that attacked them along the line of route, this weekly 'outing' was a ritual not to be

missed. At the entrance to the market was the crockery stall, under the riotous flare-lights of which stood the perspiring salesman shouting himself hoarse before a crowd of graven images, unmoved by his passionate claims for the wares he was offering at 'starvation prices,' and 'positively never to be repeated,' and 'guaranteed to be less cracked than you that stand theer like stuffed dummies without snappin' 'em up.' No less voluble was the linoleum man, who kept smacking the piece for sale to emphasize his philanthropic lowering of prices. 'Six bob,' (smack) 'that's rock-bottom and yer can take it or leave it.' Pause. 'Come on, misses, 'ere's a bargain fer a lifetime.' Pause. 'Wat, are yer all broke? I dunno watcher come in this 'ere place fer at all; to git a bit er free entertainment, I should think.' Pause. "'Ere,' (as he rolls it up) 'five an' a tanner, an' we'll say nowt about it.' Nothing more is said about it and he tries his luck with another piece. Then there were the vendors of cough mixture and cure-all medicines, who held their audiences spellbound by their mystical understanding of the ailments from which every one suffered, and eventually under their hypnotic influence their listeners cheerfully paid up for an immediate cure. More attractive still, were the dumps of odds and ends, among which people searched with endless energy in the hope of finding the right screw or key or anything else from a washer to a bicycle-frame. Then came the odour of frying sausages from a sizzling pan presided over by a corpulent gentleman, who required no further advertisement for his rolls, and it was at his kitchen that I was often allowed to regale myself and munch the 'vital' as we walked along. The next stopping-place was at the second-hand clothes, where a crowd of women sorted out garments and argued about the price before making a purchase. If, from my mother's efforts, I came to wear a fresh pair of knickerbockers or a faded jacket, it was because my elder brothers' clothes were not ready for the new lease of

life on my own body. The law of inheritance in this respect was very strong in our family.

As we grew older the three-roomed house became too small for ten occupants, which compelled our removal to a larger one a short distance away. A parlour, an extra bedroom, and an underground kitchen, were decided improvements, and with a little back garden to use as a playground, we had reached a higher rung in the social ladder. The parlour was furnished by the slow process of picking up things at second-hand shops, and with the arrival of an old piano, the cultural life of the home made a beginning. But though most of us soon learned to strum out the National Anthem and 'Abide With Me,' my brother and I also used it to cancel out my father's voice by thumping on the keys during his obstreperous moods. The underground scullery was equally important because, though damp and dingy, it allowed a desirable transference of bathing facilities from the tub to the copper, in which receptacle we sat like Diogenes, but more out of pleasure than penance. Better accommodation, however, did not improve family happiness nor the relationship between father and children. My elder brother, who had now started work, began to contest these parental attacks, and as he received my active sympathy, there were constant rows that made home life almost unbearable. So we took to roaming the streets at night and returning late enough to fetch a fish-and-chip supper before stealing silently to bed. To allow us to sit and read a book was not within my father's toleration. Prizes we had from school every year, but as the gilt on the bindings was more important than the contents, they were put into a glass-case for show purposes. Apart from the books I used at school, I do not recollect having read a single volume up to the age of fourteen.

I left school at thirteen and a half, having reached the

top standard, and passed the Labour Examination to enable me to earn my own living. As the law forbade me to enter a factory for another six months, I stayed at home during this time and continued domestic work as a full-time job. The help I was able to give to my mother takes an honoured place in these reminiscences, for though it did not stay the course of her growing ill-health, it eased the strain and suffering she endured on the threshold of the grave.

This first epoch of my life ends with the shedding of knickerbockers in favour of long trousers. Precisely when this momentous change was to take place became a vexed question for many months, for apart from the terrors I had of what other boys would say, the prospects of stepping over the boundary of boyhood into adolescence was like parting from a dear friend for all time. But to be honest with myself, I could not really regret the childhood that was passing; rather I was glad of my awakening individuality and of the promise of becoming independent of the conditions that brought so little happiness. I had already realized from the life of other boys that material poverty need not necessarily be the graveyard of fatherly affection and comradeship, but not having either of these blessings I longed for emergence from a cramped home life, from the daily tittle-tattle of venomous tongues, from verminous beds and sleepless nights, and from the sordid struggle in which every penny had to be spent subject to a ruthless economy. Not that I was destitute of the graces, which even the poorest of children manage to preserve. Mentally alert, as tribal hunters have to be, I could apply cunning or caresses, as the occasion required. Sitting back in the choir-stalls one Sunday night, I formed the mental picture of my father suddenly dying and of my watching his coffin being lowered into the clammy earth. Such was the clemency of childhood that tears began to roll down my cheeks. I could not think of my mother passing away. She, who had taught me good manners

and influenced the better side of my character, and who knew nothing of the perversities by which my short history was already tarnished—how could she die before I had grown up and repaid the care and self-sacrificing attention she had bestowed on her large family? I began to form ambitious plans for the future. As soon as I had reached my fourteenth birthday I would go down to the factory to work and give her money. But I could not do that in patched-up knickerbockers; they would offer me only a kid's wage. I would get into long trousers at once.





## II. Youth and Early Manhood

so think I will  
That youth and I are housemates still.

COLERIDGE.

ON reaching my fourteenth birthday, my first momentous view of life began to take shape. Promoted from knickerbockers to long trousers and from the schoolboy collar to the adolescent tie, I faced the responsibility of earning my own living. My first intention was to get into an office and to share the respectability of those young 'pen pushers,' who, I noticed, were always dressed smartly and went off not too early in the morning. But not having the parental guidance to enter this 'fair house of joy,' I was compelled to act on my father's remark that as Mr So-and-so on the other side of the road always seemed to be in work, I should try and get a job at his place. 'His place,' was P. and C.'s, the gas-meter manufacturers at the bottom of the road, and as Mr So-and-so duly banged his door at six-thirty every morning and returned about the same hour in the evening, and as in addition, he always kept sober and had a son that was 'getting on' (though getting on at what was never explained), there was sufficient motive for me to sit down one February evening and compose a letter, in which I inquired whether the firm were in need of an 'industrious, respectable boy to learn the trade.'

To learn a trade in those days, generally meant articulated apprenticeship, but as my elder brother had already been bound to a job, under the terms of which he was to work for only a few shillings a week until he was twenty-one, his rebellious reactions to this arrangement had brought about my own exemption from similar

limitations. I was to get the best wages I could, without reference to premiums and apprenticeships. Much to my astonishment, I received a reply by return of post, asking me to call and interview the works manager, a Mr Baker. So, with a new cap and collar and a special parting in my hair, I went down to the works on the appointed morning and timidly pushed open the little door to the workmen's entrance. The door closed and I stood in the narrow passage like a frightened bird, wondering what the next move was. I had not long to wait. It was made by a ponderous timekeeper, who suddenly switched round half his hemisphere in my direction and glared at me like an angry walrus, through the glass panels of his cabin. 'Watdeyer want?' he shouted. 'Waitere till I fetch Mr Baker,' and off he strutted, carrying my letter. Left to myself, I noticed the check board above my head, on which were suspended hundreds of numbered brass discs that represented the workmen as they timed in and out of the factory. Further reflection was stopped by the arrival of Mr Baker, in a tweed cap, a white apron, and a soothing countenance. This presentation was surprising, for I imagined that nothing short of a top hat and frock-coat could signify a work's manager. Mr Baker soon put me at ease and sympathetically questioned me about my character and capabilities with such favourable results that he said I could start work on the following Monday at five shillings a week, and that I should need a white apron and a keen sense of punctuality. I rushed home to break the news to my mother, who soon provided the apron and the good advice to prevent shipwreck on this uncharted sea of life.

The gas-meter works formed a crazy medley of foundries and workshops that seemed to have sprung up in all ages to no design but with sufficient purpose to accommodate the machinery and men that operated together year in and year out. At five minutes to seven each morning, 'Cockey' (the timekeeper) sounded a

warning bell over the district to hurry on the workers, lest they found the door locked against them for another quarter of an hour. After that time there was no entry until nine o'clock, which late arrival was looked upon as a serious offence. I made my *début* as the bell was ringing, put my check in the slot and waited while hundreds of men came through into the yard. As the morning was dark and wintry, a sickly reflection was thrown on to these passing faces by a feeble gas-lamp. Stacks of old meters threw off an odour of stale gas, while under a shed stood rows and rows of newly-painted meters like a regiment of soldiers in scarlet uniforms. Presently, Mr Baker arrived with benignant smile and bowler hat, and conducted me to a workshop where I was placed under the charge of a lean and lanky foreman, who set me to my first job. This was to file the end parts of some lead fittings to a particular angle, and to trim them neatly with a sharp knife. I sat at a small bench under a gas-jet in a damp corner of the shop, which was known as the testing-room. By the aid of hydraulic gas-cylinders the meters were tested to a point of accuracy before leaving the factory, but the superfluous gas that permeated the atmosphere, soon made me feel that I was a gasometer myself. As there was practically no daylight nor ventilation, I was not surprised to hear that three of the four testers had developed consumption, and periodically had to stay away from work. At eight-thirty the bell rang again for the half-hour's breakfast-time, which allowed no margin for getting home unless one lived very near the factory. As there was no mess room or any accommodation for eating, we had our food at the benches, made tea in tins provided by the sheet metal workers, and cooked bacon or sausages in improvised utensils by a system of pooling. The wheels of industry commenced again punctually at nine, and at the dinner-hour I was able to go home, returning for a further four hours, to complete my first day's life in a factory. When the bell rang at six o'clock and I with the

other boys, youths, and men trooped out of the gates, I felt like a butterfly emerging from a dark corner, with the bright wings of fancy clipped. What appalled me was the easy facility the men showed for obscene conversation. Though I was no stranger to bad language, I was impressionable enough to feel the tingle of embarrassment at the use of the dirtier type of expressions that vulgarized sex.

My first resolve was to get out of that horrible corner of the testing-room and to find out which department of the trade would suit me best. But as my ambitious eyes went round the works the conditions under which the men worked made it difficult to arrive at a decision.

To any one with a regard for health, most of the shops offered little, and I soon came to understand how the scourge of consumption got so many victims. The first place I entered was a small smelting shop where the lead refuse of old meters was melted down in cupolas and cleansed before being used for new castings. Dense fumes darkened the atmosphere and the two smelters, Wilkins and Harvey, were definitely down for lung demolition. Harvey was a little man who accepted his fate with humorous complacency, but Wilkins had some of the enlightenment of a scholar, and could scientifically explain the effects of the atmosphere on his body and the working improvements beyond his power of adoption. As I was destined to draw on his knowledge by many long talks, I came to know something of the courage and pathos of the industrial casualty list.

The brass shop was a whirling mass of machinery, where the men worked in a deafening noise and dusty atmosphere with very inadequate ventilation. Worse still was the iron-foundry, in which the rough castings of meters were filed smooth by hand and machine and where a thick haze of filing dust was inevitably breathed in by the men. When I first saw this foundry in the misty glare of the gas-lights and met the bloodshot eyes of men with perspiration running down blackened

cheeks as files and hammers screeched and dinned through the polluted atmosphere I thought that hell itself would be a preferable place to work in. But I managed to get a better close-up of that infernal abode by visiting the polisher who worked in a kind of 'box-room' over revolving brushes that threw into his face a poisonous cloud of particles from the metal he polished. The irony of his job was that while he brightened the brasses he blackened his lungs in the process and made periodical visits to the sanatorium for treatment. A married man, with a family, he told me he was condemned to an early grave. Then there was the repair shop, where defective meters were reconditioned in the gaseous effluvia that emanated from their foul interiors. The deft handling of brushes in the painting-shop made a stronger appeal, but as the payment was small and promotion slow, I passed on in search of a department that lay nearer the moon. This I discovered by ascending the two flights of stairs that led to the top shop. With the manager's office at one end, a first aid accessory at the other, and rows of clean-looking skilled workers in between, there was little mistaking that here was the élite of the factory. This was not because the job of soldering and shaping metal had a more intrinsic value than any other in the works but simply because the men were highly organized in the Sheet Metal Workers' Union and could enforce better conditions of labour. I thereupon, aspired to become one of the élite, a member of the trade union, and, if the fates decreed, a respectable craftsman in clean collar and shirt for the rest of my life.

To be a union man was a distinction. Lower-paid work might be more arduous and equally important, but as the men in these jobs had no organized status, they were classed as labourers and were definitely in an inferior position. In fact, a sort of industrial snobbery arose out of the distinction which graded the workers after the manner of soldiers, of whom the major ranks paraded in bowler hats and collars and ties, and the

minor in mufflers and caps. If the union men showed more contentment and conservatism in outlook than the labourers, it was as much due to the social advantage of having a parlour and a piano as to the possession of a trade union card.

Much has been written about the psychological effects of men grouped together in factories and in conditions where the free exchange of ideas and opinions becomes a daily practice. Anticipating the conclusions of later years I found little evidence to convince me that individuality flourished in the close contact of factory life or that generally speaking anything better emerged than a stubborn domination of the group mind over the individual worker. To be oneself courageously and unashamed in matters of dress, talk, and action, meant running the gauntlet of ridicule and tribal opposition. Much easier was it to fall into the rut and become moulded to mediocrity. The preparation for this attitude was in the elementary schools. After mass education in which the absorption of historical absurdities was more important than mental development, boys passed into the factories with minds ill-equipped to withstand a new environment. Impressionable to all the ugly suggestions that daily crowd on him, strong must be the will of a boy to resist the shattering of healthy illusions. The filthy language of married men, who discuss their own sex habits, generally gives the first shock which jolts him out of decent emotions and prepares the way for depraved habits and a depraved outlook on life. Growing up in an atmosphere of constraint in which individual thought and action stubbornly follow the groove of class prejudice, there eventually emerges the 'sound, solid British working-man.'

As I was faced with these conditions at the outset, I soon realized that I had to choose between submission to the 'life of the factory' and a conscious resistance to the unwholesome aspects of it with tact and determination. To gain flattery from elders by imitating their vulgar talk

and suggestions was the pitfall, and I resolved, without moral conceit, to follow my own line of conduct by retaining clean speech and a respectful opinion of woman. If these went, I felt that whatever goodness was in my character would go with them. This led me into a battle with the coarser men, in which I suffered much persecution. For years I endured the taunts and provocation of the young and old in a struggle for self-mastery. Call it priggishness if you like, but to spend nine hours a day among workmen who try to beat down your individuality to their level requires a stronger motive than a sense of moral superiority if you want successfully to repulse the attack. Though the urge to hold out grew stronger the more it was tested, there were times when the contest made me so utterly miserable that I felt like 'throwing in the towel,' and acknowledging defeat. It was my first real struggle to overcome environment, and provides the clue to much that I shall record later on. If I seem to attach undue importance to this early attitude, it is because I believe the turning-point of a man's life can often be traced to the years of adolescence.

I had not been at the factory many weeks before my mother was taken seriously ill and put to bed. Her condition grew rapidly worse, and when a new steam-kettle arrived to increase the temperature of the room and the doctor visited her twice a day, we all realized that death was knocking at the door. Whisperings and soft footsteps told of his approach, and hoping my fears were playing me false I quietly stepped into the sick-room to hear my mother's heavy breathing as her breast heaved up and down with alarming difficulty. Yet, having seen her so often on the bed of sickness, I refused to believe that the end was near. I remember going to work during those days with a desperate conviction that she would recover, and returning each evening to



coal up the fire and give what help I could to make that conviction come true. But it was all in vain. When neighbours brought flowers as a farewell offering and I lingered at the foot of the bed to glance at her flushed face, still beautiful under her jet-black hair, I knew by the wisp of a smile that crossed her features, that her life was flickering out. The doctor came and shook his head and within a few hours I saw her for the first time in perfect rest, with her hands crossed upon her breast and the burial shroud symbolizing the end of the journey. The next day I stole silently into that room of death and without the slightest tremor or fear, rested my warm lips on her cold, clammy forehead as a final token of my affection.

On the day of the funeral I tried hard to cry but failed. My emotions had become stifled. I was obsessed by the idea that my mother's death was a kind of 'serve you right' to my father and that to emulate his grief would be like sharing a false sentiment. Even at the graveside I felt unmoved, and it was not until I was absolutely alone and could reflect on the loss with a tranquil mind that tears flowed and my heart became heavy with sorrow.

My eldest sister took charge of the home, but as everything came under the unrelieved domination of my father, life became increasingly unhappy. Instead of softening in character, his added responsibilities made him harder and more bitter and the position became more difficult for his elder children to endure. His tongue was like an affliction in the home and the best thing to do was to keep out of his presence. After work I hurried out to spend the night walking the streets or to sit in New Street station to watch the trains and envy the life of the commercial travellers who emerged from comfortable dining-saloons without a care in the world. If I could only get a job as a waiter on one of those trains and wear a uniform and see the country and never go home. . . . then it occurred to me that as I had very

little pocket-money and not a bad face, why not offer to carry the bags of those commercial gentlemen who had to walk the distance to Snow Hill station. I experimented and found I was surprisingly successful. Other enterprising boys were also in the business, but having shabbier clothes and less guile than myself they were often chased off by the station policeman. If I had kept a sharp look-out for his 'rail highness' it was to pose as a potential passenger as soon as he set eyes on me. And if my presence on the arrival platform gave rise to any awkward question, well, there was always an uncle I was waiting to meet. As a rule, I enjoyed sufficient freedom to sidle up to a kindly old gent who looked as much laden within as without and to catch his ear with a 'Carry your bag, sir,' at the same time as my hand went out to catch the handle before he had a chance to reply in the negative. No doubt the state of his order-book often determined the decision, which, if satisfactory, led to my sweating up Temple Street with the load on my shoulder, on through St Phillip's churchyard, and finally into the old grey station, where I was threateningly gazed at by the presiding policeman as my employer put a few coppers in my hand. Thus I learned the arrival times of all the important business trains, when to dash under the subways to the various platforms, and the sort of clientèle likely to be the most profitable. Then, with the extra money to spend, I received a special welcome by an Italian ice-cream dealer before going home to a fish-and-chip supper. If my father was in before me there was bound to be conflict and a quick departure for bed, where I reflected that a job on the trains was becoming an urgent necessity.

Not having a wider outlook on life and probably intent on getting us off his hands as quickly as possible, my father now began to prod us with the idea of sex mating, as if the sole reason for existence was to follow his example of early courtship, marriage, a large family, and of leaving the rest to chance. A courting couple

that used to stand near the back entrance to our house so kindled his sex imagination that I was repeatedly reminded of my juvenile (I was only fourteen) perversity in not getting a girl with whom to spend the evening hours in a similar way. As my other brothers and sisters were also expected to search out future betrothals our scornful resistance resulted in none of my friends ever crossing our doorstep. It led to a repression of my sex instinct and a growing sense of frustration in all matters pertaining to healthy development. I wanted to read books, take up a hobby, learn music, and excel in some activity that would prevent the wastage of leisure time. First, I bought a flute from a boy and learned to pipe out a few tunes in the lofty security of the attic, until the parental pestilence drove me out. Then I smuggled into the bedroom a zylophone set and tapped out tunes on the brass keys for a longer period than I dared anticipate. For I was assisted in this effort by a sister who kept a look out for my father approaching the gate, and when she shouted up the stairs: 'He's coming,' I would clap the instrument into its hiding-place and rush downstairs. Hostilities intensified as the months went on and eventually became unbearable. To avoid constant uproar, my brother and I resorted to the parlour to have meals.

Within the first year after my mother's death, domestic life became so intolerable that I suggested to my brother at the end of one stormy evening that we should clear out and fight our own way in the world. He agreed, as it was evident that the antagonism would soon take a violent course. To leave the younger children at the mercy of my father was not an easy matter, but we argued that our action might strike at the sentimental part of his nature and induce a more considerate behaviour to them. Our chief difficulty was to decide how and where to live, for as we earned only about ten shillings between us, it was impossible to go into lodgings and

to keep ourselves in addition. I remembered, however, that during my wanderings round the streets of Birmingham, I had often passed the Rowton House—a huge barrack-like building where the flotsam and jetsam of the male portion of the town paid sixpence a night for a bed. We decided to go to live there. This could only be done by pooling our wages and living as frugally as possible. We took good care to keep the conspiracy a secret and smuggled into the home a couple of tin boxes which were to hold our worldly possessions. These we hid under the bed and quietly filled them with our belongings the night before our departure. Then one Friday afternoon we both played truant from work, shouldered our boxes like youngsters going off to sea and marched out of the house, leaving our sister in tears and a note for our father. Neither neighbours' eyes, suspicious policemen, nor an irate parent chasing after us, would have given us any terrors during that flight, for once over the doorstep and out of the gate, we were determined never to return. As no one knew our destination, we assured ourselves of at least an untroubled first night in our new abode.

Arriving at the Rowton House, hot and dusty, and with our shoulders aching under the weight of our boxes, our small figures were eyed with interest by the poor old habitués of the establishment. No doubt we carried the sign of the fugitive, for we had to learn that seldom anything more than a bundle of goods was taken in by the visitors. The Legion of the Lost acted as their own hall-porters. But public opinion counted little on that occasion. After waiting for the doors to open (officials were not 'at home' until a stated time in the evening), we duly paid our bed money at the turnstile and were given a cubicle number and a key by a gentleman who looked about to cross-examine us, perhaps with less motive of finding out whether we were undesirables for the place than to ascertain whether the place was desirable for us. We got inside the building

with its odorous disciplinary atmosphere and the strange company of men. Never have I regretted that early experience of associating with the human derelicts, the outcasts and the forgotten old men who were eking out the last years of life without a friend in the world. My sympathies were roused the first night when I lay awake in a little cubicle listening to the slow, heavy clump of feet up and down the corridors, the banging of doors and the coughing and spitting of asthmatical men who couldn't afford the price of a good meal, let alone a bottle of medicine.

As we knew all about housekeeping on little money there was no difficulty in making a start in this direction. Renting a locker, we put in a small stock of essential provisions and used the communal kitchen to boil an egg or make some tea. Here a huge fire seemed to blaze away all day, at which the men did their own cooking with pans and saucepans, and joked and cursed according to the measure of success with which they manœuvred a sausage or a rasher of bacon. Less fortunate lodgers sat round to get the warmth of the fire and to contemplate the luxuries of which they only got the smells. No questions were asked of one another, and the rough diamonds of the house encouraged us into the inner circle, as if we needed the protection of elder brethren. But it was not until we sat at the long, bare table to eat our food that we found out who many of these elder brethren were. Prisons were discussed freely and we soon realized that we were among hardened jail-birds and men of strange professional undertakings. And as they showed not the slightest concern about our presence I began to wonder whether they thought that we were in the line of succession for their particular callings. It was the entire absence of a social and civic sense that impressed me most. I remember sitting opposite a hardened law-breaker whose cynical candour was almost uncanny, and having his sharp, bleary eyes fixed on me as he said with a confidential squint: 'If yo'

ever git landed in Winsun, laddy, keep clear o' the bloke with the wart on 'is nose.' As I had already heard of the beauties of Winsun Green jail, I had no reason to query the import of his fatherly advice.

But there were other men of less distinguished character—labourers, badly paid artisans, workers who were in and out of jobs, and old men thrown out on to the industrial scrapheap. These men sat apart and said little. The rebel in me was beginning to stir. Hovering about in the glimmering light of the wash-house before dawn, where the wraiths of poverty and crime flitted in and out, I became exasperated by the thought of the social harshness that compelled so many people to live out a miserable existence. Our struggle seemed mild compared to theirs, for we could always go off to work each morning with bread and butter in one pocket and a mixture of tea, sugar, and condensed milk in the other. Then we returned at night to have a meal together and to balance up expenditure. We determined to keep on the credit side. Not being able to go beyond the bare necessities of life we soon learned the value of money and the power it has to the satisfaction of desire.

After about six months of this life we got a rise in wages and decided to search for cheap private lodgings. My abiding recollection of the Rowton House was its peculiar odour which stuck in my nostrils the whole of the day. I have never lost it. I have often thought that public institutions (including hospitals) would lose much of their repellent atmosphere if more attention were paid to the psychology of smell. In answer to an advertisement in the local newspaper for 'cheap lodgings for respectable working boys,' we received a letter that directed us to a small house in Sherlock Street, where a kindly old lady, Mrs Evans, offered to take us in for a few shillings a week. We shared a bed in the top room of the house in company with Sam, the landlady's son, and Bill, a middle-aged lodger, who occupied smaller beds opposite to one another. Our hopes were centred

on a peaceful haven where sleep would come undisturbed. But disillusion followed. Sam was a drunkard and just as we had fallen into a deep sleep we were startled out of it by the heavy plonk of feet coming up the stairs, followed by the door being flung back and this besotted man staggering in the darkness against our bed before groping his way to his own and sprawling across it like a doped animal. There he would lie vomiting filthy language from his disordered brain and the drink from his body, kicking the floor with his heavy boots, while Bill cursed him from one side of the room as we lay half stupefied by fright and the offensive odour, on the other.

Bill was also a drinker, but seldom drank to excess. The taste was there, but not the money, for though he was employed by a brewery to do heavy labouring work, he was paid under a pound a week. This had held up his marriage plans and led to a protracted courtship that kept him on the path of righteousness until Saturday evening, when he issued forth in best suit and bowler hat to meet his beloved, but only to return in the small hours much poorer in poise and pocket. When both men came drunk into the bedroom there was generally a stupid scene that kept me trembling with fear till they snored their way to sleep. Compared with this the Rowton House seemed heavenly, but the kindly attention of old Mrs Evans was so motherly that we hadn't the courage to go. We had become inured to discomfort.

It was in this fifteenth year of life that I was faced with the problem of what to do with my leisure. As there was no inducement to stay in my lodgings after working hours I walked the streets at night in solitary contemplation of what plan to adopt to make best use of the freedom I enjoyed. To have a boy friend constantly at my side would limit my choice of action, so I preferred the company of my own thoughts. I was hungry for knowledge and having an urge to achieve

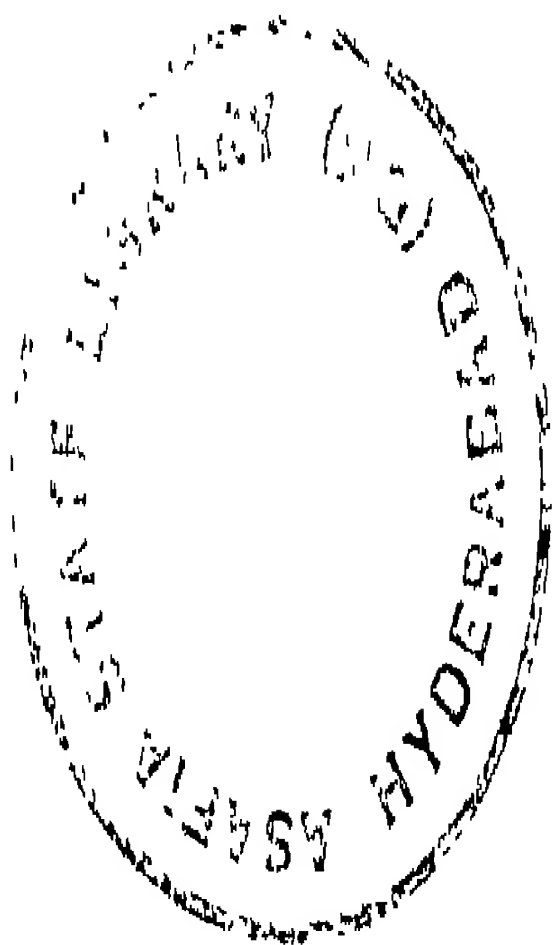
something great and noble I started off by penetrating the slum areas of Digbeth and Deritend, which had the reputation of being unsafe for respectable people to walk through. This gave my tours the glamour of heroic adventure, and though I peeped down dark alleys and into squalid courts with a half fear that I should be struck down by a 'peaky blinder' at any moment, my courage was assured by the thought that I was a potential crusader for social upliftment. I had forgotten the danger of having a few coppers in my pocket until one evening when a young woman with a shawl over her head and looking half famished and in the depths of misery, sidled up and plaintively asked whether I would go with her for twopence. I gave her the few coppers I had and quickly walked on confused by such an experience. My first sex challenge, I felt a Sir Galahad in resisting the invader. During other evenings I went to the public 'Forum' in the Bull Ring to enjoy the oratorical fervour of agitators holding forth within the shadow of St Martin's Church and at the feet of Gladstone's statue. Here gathered all sorts of speakers to air their views and to those who had ears to hear and minds to learn this provincial Hyde Park Corner could be the university of aspiring youth. It was not what was shouted from the platforms that mattered so much as what was said in committee; among the little groups of thinkers that formed on the edge of the crowd, and thrashed out the subjects with true Socratic zeal. As my own share in the talks was too slight to be effective, I plunged headlong into learning and commenced studying religious and political problems—Free Trade and Tariff Reform, Evangelism and Denominationalism, Capitalism and Socialism, Poverty in the midst of Plenty, and of the crusade for the Restoration of the Land to the People. This crusade was being conducted by that wonderful patriarchal Scottish agitator, Alexander Stuart Gray, whose visits to the Birmingham Bull Ring were always of some moment. I write (1937) a few



months after the death of this modern John Ball, whose attractive figure and persistent zeal for the cause he had at heart were so symbolic of our inverted values that he passed away without Fleet Street turning a hair or a Labour leader having to scribble a single note. For Gray was a splendid example of an agitator burning himself out for the common people and being flung among the forgotten and unrecorded as the price for sincerity. As a young man he had given up a fortune and a lucrative position in Scotland to blaze a trail of agitation for restoring the land to the people, having come to the conclusion, as a result of study, that they had been robbed of this inheritance. To have vast multitudes of unemployed (there was no unemployment benefit in those days) denied the means of livelihood and locked out from the land that could provide both sustenance and useful work, was to Gray the *bête noir* of social evils. He therefore set about preaching 'The Land for the People' like a hot gosseller, rallying the unemployed up and down the country, disturbing the peace inside and outside council chambers (for which he was thrown scores of times into prison), commanding Salisbury Plain with an army of unemployed armed with picks and shovels, and eventually starting a self-supporting Owenite Colony that floundered in its own impossible undertakings. In more recent years he was a familiar figure at Hyde Park Corner, where his twinkling eyes and flashing humour were as entertaining to his audience as the strange kind of sceptre he always held in his hand. As the few coppers he received from friends outside the park gates were his only means of support, he lived as humbly as St Francis and was the essence of self-sacrificing zeal. One night he invited me down to his basement lodging in a house at the back of Tottenham Court Road, where his own crude paintings of Savage Art (as he described it) enlivened the walls, and an old statue of Light, holding the magical lamp, looked down on a litter of mouldy books and a



*Alexander Stewart Gray*



mattress rolled up on the floor. Over a burnt-out fire rested a pot of stew—an extraordinary concoction discernible through the layers of fat that floated on the top. But all his abodes were temporary. The landlords saw to that. And when in later years I sought the full story of his life for journalistic purposes and followed his directions for the morning's interview at his 'country residence,' I had to tramp beyond Hendon before finding the dilapidated wooden shack wherein lay the old warrior, like a legendary Ulysses exposed to wind and rain. As he poured out to me his amazing life's story in dedication to his Great Ideal, the shades of Morris, Whitman, Ruskin, and of the great reformers, seemed to fill that shack, the Good Companions of his solitude. So far from accepting payment for the interview, he offered me his remaining few coppers for tram fare back to London. Had this old general of social reform led armies of destruction with half the zeal with which he led the armies of the unemployed for the conquest of the right to live, he would long ago have been proclaimed a national hero and entered for the history books of the future. May his ghost still haunt the market-places and whisper encouragement to those who follow the trail.

The decision I made to get understanding and to keep my eyes turned towards the heavens was definite and absorbing. By what psychological process I came to make the choice I have never been able to determine, for in view of my upbringing, the dismal life of the factory, and the freedom at my command, it was easier to go the road of the circus than that of the seminary. Why did I resist the only environment I had known and form a new conception of life for which I was prepared to strive? Why should I react to conditions as I did, while other children brought up under similar conditions acted otherwise? I cannot answer.

As it was too uncomfortable to remain with Mrs Evans, we planned to get away at the earliest opportunity.

Bad as it was to suffer the inconvenience of Sam's drunken habits it was more distressing to see the declining years of his old mother blighted by shame and worry. My brother accepted the offer of cheap lodgings from a shopkeeper friend in return for looking after the accounts, and I made terms with another old landlady who kept a little home in the Pershore Road. So we now separated to travel independent roads.

My new environment was helpful and satisfying. Mrs Winton was a refined lady with the grace and prejudices of a Victorian upbringing, and with sufficient intelligence to understand and effectively deal with the whims and idiosyncrasies of growing youth. I say this in grateful remembrance of her unquestioning acceptance of my strange moods, when I refused to have milk in my tea, or when I went up to my bedroom for long periods with unaccountable sulks. The truth was that, as I had started adolescence in a blaze of idealism, the conflicting ugliness of factory life often drove my spirits into the depths. I rushed to poetry for escape and lived a double existence by seeking the slopes of Parnassus in thought while my hands mechanically soldered lead fittings or malletted sheet metal into shape at the grimy benches of the workshop. The resolutions I repeatedly made to learn the trade thoroughly and to work conscientiously availed little in a world of poetic fancy, and I soon came to regard the factory as the inferno from which the Dante in me would have to escape. Each night I hurried into my best second-hand suit of clothes, hurried down my tea and then hurried off to evening class to learn English grammar and literature. And what a revelation it was. Knowing nothing of the great poets and essayists, I was like a child that becomes ecstatic with a firework display. The study of style and the composition of poetry were especially fascinating, and I used to go to bed with Addison or Macaulay flashing in my mind and with my emotions stirred by the *Ode to the Nightingale*. And it was not long

before I had a passionate desire to become a poet or a writer myself. This brought me in contact with the Central Free Library in Chamberlain Square and if I am grateful to Birmingham for nothing else, I bless the municipality for the hospitality of that splendid library. Every available evening I spent in the reference room, searching for books which put me in company with the literary giants of the past. The *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, the advice of Epictetus, the principles of Longinus and the logic of the *Dialogues* of Plato I studied with particular relish for their wisdom seemed to be capable of modern application. I began to wonder in what way we had advanced from the ancient civilizations of Greece and Rome.

I found my greatest pleasure and satisfaction in reading poetry. The great prose writers enlarged my knowledge of the universe and human affairs and brought into prominence those diverse problems which bear on social and religious life. From poetry, however, I derived an ecstasy that flowed from the sense of the beauty and majesty of creation. It was all-absorbing, unequivocal and complete, and raised me to spiritual exaltations which swamped the trivialities of life and gave my ego a fulness and strength in the lustre of which noble conceptions were born and flourished. And though I write this in an age when the disregard for poetry has reached a cynical depth, I am still convinced that the muse is the friend of youth. I say that life itself is incomplete without the love of poetry, for it is a tonic to the sentiments and helps towards self-realization in the beauty of the universe. It has been said that we are all potential poets; to recognize that we are all potential *lovers* of poetry would be sufficient to stamp out much of the ugliness and squalor that unpoetical minds have created.

Tennyson was my earliest love, not because he gave any deep insight into human nature, but because his lyrical simplicity appealed strongly to adolescent romanticism. The tributes he paid in his early poems to the

virgin beauty of growing womanhood were exquisite corroborations of my own ideals and helped me to sustain that ideal against the onslaughts of factory vulgarity. How the image of

Airy, fairy Lilian

and Isabel's:

Eyes not down dropt nor over-bright, but fed  
With the clear-pointed flame of chastity.

and:

The ever varying Madeline

freshened my inner self amid the filthy sex talk that was bandied about the shop. I memorized large slices of the *Idylls of the King*. With Shelley I shared the sadness of human frailty. Except for some of his shorter poems, Browning was too involved for me, while I restricted my reading of Shakespeare to his *Sonnets*. But the most ravishing of all was Keats. While others gave stimulus to mind and emotion, Keats was like champagne to the senses and kept the joyous bubbles winking at the brim.

But this passion for poetry gave me such grandiloquent thoughts of life and its purpose that for a number of years I read only the books that gave a high moral teaching and sided with the loftiest conceptions of manhood. What I was really striving for was a sort of self-realization of the first magnitude, and any books that helped towards the development of character I gulped down with avidity. Their titles and authors were of little moment compared with their contents and I am sure that most of the moralists and philosophers of the last two centuries received something of my patronage. I was also thankful for the monthly and quarterly magazines that lay on the tables of the library, for their instructive articles were equal to anything I could have heard in the lecture-room. From the theological entanglements of *Hibbert's Journal*, I passed

to the more worldly regions of the *English Review*, on to the literary vastness of the *Edinburgh*, through the critical orbs of the *Criterion*, and completed the circle with many others that improved my knowledge of the -isms and -ologies that were constantly under the eye of speculation. But without systematic guidance, there seemed so much to learn that I wanted to know something about everything before settling to learn everything about something.

This evening study was a vital part of my life. I carried it on against obstacles. It happened that my father was in the habit of going to the same library to study 'racing form' in the newspapers, and as I had no desire to meet him I kept a sharp look-out to avoid any unpleasant contact. If I chanced to see him on the opposite side of the road I immediately got behind some hefty pedestrian or dodged into a shop doorway until there was a safe distance between us, which I then preserved by careful espionage all the way to the library. Knowing that once in the building he would never mount the steps to the reference room (I doubt whether he knew of its existence), I sprinted the remainder of the journey and was soon seated silent and secure in my favourite sanctuary. But on one occasion I was not so fortunate. The incident happened when I was working in the repair shop of the factory, where my clothes became impregnated with the gaseous effluvia that emerged from the defective meters. To avoid going about as a mobile gasometer, I generally changed into another suit of clothes after working hours, though my own nostrils had become accustomed to the smell. One evening, however, in my anxiety to have a long sitting at the library, I rushed off in my working clothes. Sitting in my customary seat near the counter, I suddenly became aware of some confusion at the back of me, and looking round was surprised to find two policemen and a number of officials feverishly pulling out piles of books from the shelves and sniffing along the walls. The



next moment a fireman in full regalia hurried in, and after a brief, breathless conversation with a man who looked the hero of the piece, also set his hands and nose investigating, but with more professional concern. By this time all the students in the place had become alarmed and expected flames to burst forth at any moment. Then it occurred to me that it was my gaseous clothes they could smell. So in a state of panic, I got up, passed between the rows of anxious eyes, and with a face like a beetroot, quickly passed out into the street. What transpired I shall never know; but if in the archives of the Birmingham Reference Library there appears a record of this mystery I hope that my apologies to all the municipal departments concerned, will be duly added.

By the time I was seventeen, my passion for reading had become so intense that a few hours during the evening seemed totally insufficient for what I wanted to do. But I started to spend odd shillings in second-hand bookshops and to keep my pockets stuffed with a volume or two for the purpose of reading when I ought to have been working. Chief among these first purchases were the volumes from Everyman's Library. What a boon they were! A handy size for the pocket, they introduced me to Emerson's essays, Marcus Aurelius, Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria*, Carlyle, and to other writers. Now that the Library has grown to be the greatest treasure-house of knowledge in the world, the influence it has had in helping to raise the general standard of learning must be beyond calculation. In my formative years, 'Everyman' was 'Guide, Philosopher, and Friend,' and I cherish an unfading gratitude to those who promoted this epic of publishing.

But the methods I adopted to read the books would not have been supported by the publishers. As I had now been transferred from the testing-room to a crafts-

man's bench in the sheet metal department, I sat at a little gas stove that heated soldering irons, and learnt the skilled job of making and putting together gas-meter fittings among a number of other mechanics who worked on either side. At one end of the shop stood the foreman's little glass office, from which he could observe all that was going on through the windows in front of him. To obstruct his view was my only chance of reading, so I formed a screen by putting boxes of fittings (ostensibly for use) on the vital part of the bench, fixed a small mirror in line with the door of his office, and then stealthily drew from my pocket Everyman's *Sartor Resartus*, which I stood against the barricade and alternated spasms of sumptuous reading with arid efforts at soldering or riveting, which I accomplished with about half the attention I gave to the print. If the foreman suddenly emerged from his office or the manager unexpectedly put in an appearance, I immediately banged something over the book. To have been caught would certainly have meant the sack, but as I managed to get through a number of volumes and to astonish my shopmates by the success of the unlawful enterprise, my lucky star was certainly in the ascendant. Sometimes it was more convenient to take a book into the lavatory and to sit there an inordinate length of time. On other occasions I disappeared into a small stock-room where fittings were contained in wooden recesses right up to the ceiling. Here, on the pretext of getting something high up, I did my reading standing on a ladder with the open book inside the recess and a box of 'excuse' beside me, in case the foreman came in to see whether I had been taken ill. In consequence, my movements began to take on a disturbing air of mystery.

But if I was no model of the industrious apprentice, Ted the foreman, gave a poor example of what I ought to be. Whether he was expected to do anything more than hand out jobs and to walk about the shop as the principle of industrial pride, no underling could decide,

but when the work's manager was about he always pretended to be doing a lot, when actually he was doing nothing. First thing in the morning he sat in his office reading his newspaper until someone gave him the hint that the manager was approaching, by shying a speck of metal at his windows, when he would dart out into the shop like a hare, commence a sham form of activity, and then acknowledge the presence of his superior with a look of surprise. He schemed to have his breakfast during working-hours and to risk the development of acute indigestion through rushing down his meal under the fear of being caught in the act. To assist him in the matter, it was my business to boil him an egg and to mash his tea, during which time all eyes were watchful of the manager's movements and ready to give Ted the tip at the slightest sign of danger. If the red light shone, out would go the gas, and Ted as well, if he was eating in the office, and a funny picture he looked trying to talk normally, with his jaws bulging with food. There were also occasions when the manager, hurrying in unexpectedly, gave no chance for the gas to be put out, and allowed Ted's egg to be boiled as hard as a brick. As the manager was obviously aware of this pretence I am sure he played a few jokes on Ted with an air of innocence.

But I think that my duplicity was more ruthless than the foreman's, for the purple patches of unlawful reading were nearly as expansive as the dreary wastes of mechanical work. No doubt a stringent employer reading these confessions would feel highly indignant at my conduct and probably think: 'the little scoundrel deserved the sack.' Perhaps I did, for I was certainly being paid for the time used in self-education. But I could at least plead a useful purpose in my delinquency and argue that as I had no affection for the job and no intention of making it a career, I was virtuously trying to overcome circumstance and to live up to the individualist's doctrine of forcing a way in life without too much moral

scruple. Besides, those who employed me did not hesitate to engage me in nine hours' labour a day at the small wage I was compelled to accept. And as the profits they made out of my work placed them under no further moral obligation than to pay me this wage and to give me whatever protection was dictated by the Factory Acts, the transaction seemed sufficiently unequal to warrant my acting in self-defence. Sometimes I met the embodiment of this disparity in the person of the managing director, who arrived at the works at nine-thirty every morning with an air of austerity that he paraded through the shops as if the workers never existed. As representing the shareholders, it was nothing to him that lads like myself turned out in the early, cold, winter mornings to work in foul gases and to breakfast amongst the dirt and poisonous conditions of the bench. I often thought that had a magician's wand on one snowy morning suddenly transferred Mr C. from his comfortable family table and warm fireside to the cold, filthy factory 'breakfast-table' as the guest elect, something might have been said at the next company meeting. A few years later something was said, for working hours were rearranged, and meals on the premises were abolished.

Life in a factory can be helped or otherwise, according to the type of workmen one has for neighbours. If they happen to be men entirely out of sympathy with one's tastes and outlook on life the daily contact with them inevitably leads to conflict and misery. It was sheer bad luck, therefore, that I was put to work next to Bill, the foreman's married son, who was such a discreditable offspring of the family that he could vitiate the character of any boy who showed no resistance to his pernicious influence. Protected by a long-suffering father, Bill preferred booze to books, and jeopardized his job by not turning up for days on end. I was then sent by his anxious parent to his miserable slummy

home to make inquiries, and invariably brought back the news that he was 'drunk in bed,' from a wife, who showed that she and her pale-faced children were the chief sufferers.

But Bill was a loathsome character, for he wallowed continuously in filthy language and disgusting sex suggestions, until I came to think that his mind was rotten to the core. He oozed obscenity and had such an extensive vocabulary that I had nothing further to learn about the language of the dissolute. Ordinary swearing is not repulsive but the jargon that animalizes sex and crawls like slimy snails over clean speech and a clean subject can sicken one with disgust. To the casual listener most of these unprintable words may have no importance, but when the full implication of their meaning is ceaselessly impressed on one, then they are filthy. Bill gave me a clear understanding of the amount of slush that can be trailed through the mind. I was compelled to ignore his presence. During the years I worked by the side of that man I never heard him express a decent thought or received from him an atom of helpful advice. What I did receive were piercing taunts and ridicule for my stubborn detachment, for Bill tried to revenge himself by cutting into my strongest sensibilities. And if there was no dearth of support in making the attack it was because the factory atmosphere seemed to draw out the basest elements of the men for the relief of boredom and to give them a tribal sort of pleasure from the infliction of pain. To have given way to the men and to have allowed myself to be beaten to the common individual pattern would certainly have saved me much pain and torment, but I hardened my resistance to the attack on effective passive lines and found consolation in the friendship of books and in the better type of workmen. My battle with Bill was indeed a test of endurance and the sternest struggle of my youth.

But the factory was not all struggle and sighs. Though I disliked the dirt and ugliness and the mono-

tonous drones of the machines, there were times when I felt that I ought to reconcile myself to the work and by sheer ability make a bid for promotion, till I eventually became the works' manager. Then the hammer had a poetic ring and gas-meters an aroma of romance that brought a lull in fugitive reading and such a diligence in my tasks that Ted the foreman was often given fresh hope of my becoming a capable workman. And to support this notion I voluntarily went to a technical evening class to learn the geometry of sheet metal craft, and tried valiantly to concentrate as much on triangles and circles as I did on literature. But it was all in vain. The voice within me kept calling me aside to sweeter fountains and the more I tasted of the waters of knowledge the more I wanted to drink. Politics especially claimed my attention and having a burning desire to reform the world I sided with Liberalism and strongly advocated the virtues of Free Trade. Most of the workers were staunch Conservatives and acclaimed Joseph Chamberlain and the Cheap Loaf doctrine with religious reverence. Protection was the magic word that captured popular sentiment, and Liberalism, so far as this factory was concerned, was a voice crying in the wilderness. I had already attended a local Conservative meeting in the 1906 election and had been appalled by the incapacity of the sitting Member for Edgbaston (to whom my father invariably gave his vote), who had represented his constituents in the House of Commons for many years by never opening his mouth. As his working-class supporters continued to take a pride in his election, I assumed that he represented their opinions quite satisfactorily. To be a Liberal in those days was bordering on being a rebel, for even in the poorest families the traditional idol of Conservatism was deeply enshrined. With the aid of the *Daily News* and pamphlets on Liberalism, I worked up a strong case against this attitude, and carried the banner of Progress into the heart of my opponent's camp. Fierce arguments took place over

the evils of dumping and the need for high tariff walls, but when I came to ask who paid the tax and whether the purchasing value of wages would fall through the increased price of protected goods, I received no satisfactory replies. As for social reform and the rise of the workers to political power, few of the men had any conception of these things, for the majority were quite content to jog along in the rut of earning a precarious living, to slander the foreigner, and thank God for the freedom of choosing the best beer, the best football club, and the best seat in the gallery of the Birmingham Empire. If I pointed out the calamity of thousands of people herding like cattle in filthy slums and of the armies of hungry unemployed men with nothing but misery before them, I was met by either a tirade against the infamous character of the unfortunate and a 'serve 'em right' idea, or by an easy sort of detachment that fixed the responsibility on to the inscrutable laws of nature. But if any social or financial misfortune overtook a duke or a well-known titled person, their sympathies welled up with intimate regard for the undeserved loss and suffering entailed.

Socialism was only mentioned with scorn, though most of the men were members of trades unions. My acquaintance with the doctrine came from Tom Rowlands of the top shop, who always wore a red tie and was looked upon as either a crank or an anarchist. But Tom was a pioneer of Socialism in a quiet sort of way. Any impressionable youth like myself could exploit his patience and knowledge and in simple, direct language learn the principles of the creed and the falsities of other beliefs. I occupied the footstool for many a pleasant hour and heard the gospel according to Morris, Keir Hardie, and Robert Blatchford. The servitude of the working-class, Tom emphasized, was the modern expression of Feudalism. The time-recording brass discs of the factory were the call to labour; dividends were the spoils of conquest for lord and master. To get control over

their own destiny the workers must first control the means of production, distribution, and exchange, but neither tariff reform nor free trade would take them one step further along this road. Between Capitalism and Labour stood the unbridgable gulf of opposing motives, for self-interest could never be reconciled with the brotherhood of man.

But this was too revolutionary a doctrine for me readily to accept, for I argued that if Liberalism was still too advanced for the majority of workers they would have to pass through that stage before reaching Socialism. Why do away with employers when there were firms like Cadbury's paying good wages and giving every attention to the social welfare of their workpeople—setting an example, in fact of the good relationship that can exist between Capital and Labour? Despite my opposition, however, Tom set me thinking and I looked about for literature that would extend my knowledge of the subject. One of the first and best discoveries was a penny booklet on Christian Socialism, which the Rev. Paul B. Bull of Mirfield had written for the million. It led me straight into the light. All that Tom had said was fully amplified in these pages and I came to realize the inherent rottenness of the existing social system. The working-class were pawns in an unholy game of greed and though they did the hardest and dirtiest work of the world they were the worst paid and always in, or on the brink of, poverty. Slums were not an act of God but the product of a ruthless, soul-destroying Commercialism. The miles and miles of ugly, monotonous streets of industrial towns in whose dismal, half-dilapidated rookeries, families crowded like cattle and children, famished of proper food, sunlight, and air, grew up to perpetuate the squalid conditions in which they were reared—these were of little credit to Christian England. Industrial freedom had led to unbridled licence for the powerful few, and slavery for the impoverished many. The limited liability companies, with



their hordes of grasping shareholders sucked the life-blood of sweated workers and then threw them pensionless and penniless on the scrap-heap when they got too old or unfit for further service. Britain's industrial history I had to know more about immediately as Tom and Parson Bull had put me hot on the scent, and I was soon reading up reports of commissions and books on labour conditions from the inception of the industrial revolution.

To reinforce my book knowledge, I took every opportunity to attend the public meetings at the Birmingham town hall. This building always filled me with awe for I still had a vivid recollection of the memorable night when Mr Lloyd George escaped from it in policeman's clothes, while the rioters broke the windows in acknowledgment of his pro-Boer sentiments. Often I gazed on the little door through which he passed, and then lingered in the corridors to get a better mental picture of the flight of the fugitive. But there was no successor to enrage public opinion and to dramatize events in that exciting fashion and I had to be content with law-abiding meetings until the arrival of the suffragettes.

One of the most impressive speakers I heard was James Larkin, who had come over from Dublin as the leader of the Irish transport strike, to plead on behalf of the starving women and children. A young man of tremendous vigour, Larkin carried the fiery cross of revolt into that audience as he stood with flashing eyes and clenched fists in defence of the strikers, pouring out a torrent of invective against the inhuman conditions they were fighting. How the tears came into his eyes as he described the children's cry for bread and the breaking up of homes and the stoical resistance of famished people to the weapon of starvation! Never had I heard such sincerity ring through that hall, and though much of the press and drawing-room critics of strikers viewed him as an irresponsible agitator who misled the workers, the James Larkin of my youth was

## YOUTH AND EARLY MANHOOD

a leader to be remembered. And listening to the same man, after an interval of nearly thirty years, addressing a meeting of the Dublin unemployed, I saw again the young Larkin, now mellowed and greyed by age, still fighting poverty and exploitation with the same earnestness and zeal as he did in those bygone days.

Of different brand was the oratory of the late Lord Curzon. An inveterate opponent of the suffragette movement, he had all the pompous affectation of a full-plumed peacock and seemed more pleased about himself than the cause he espoused. Strutting up and down the platform as he spoke, his delivery had the same weighty dignity as his manner and I felt a decided relief when he sat down in favour of a more modest speaker.

Few social reformers have a heart as large as that of George Lansbury. When I first heard him speak for the poor and oppressed his voice rang through the hall like a mighty evangel. I was among the swarm of admirers who waylaid him as he emerged from the building and paraded him shoulder-high through the streets to the chorus of 'He's a Jolly Good Fellow,' while George blushed good humouredly and looked the picture of embarrassment. In response to a call for 'speech' on the station platform, his well-known homily: 'We should not expect others to submit to conditions of living that we are not prepared to accept ourselves,' was bestowed on us as earnestly as he gives it forth to audiences to-day. It seemed most fitting (and his subsequent record has confirmed the opinion), that he was named after the patron saint of England.

Another impressive figure was Sir Oliver Lodge, whom I heard lecture when the clash between science and religion claimed as much public interest as the factions of politics. Enrobed in a scarlet academic gown, his massive form and Socratic appearance were in keeping with the giant-like nature of his erudition, for as he stood with his fine head erect in concentration, a most learned exposition of social and biological problems

seemed to flow from him as water from a fountain, and I envied his capacity in not having to refer to a single note.

Later on, I heard Christabel Pankurst and many of the prominent suffragettes. And what excellent speakers they were. Young women aflame with the crusading spirit to obtain votes for their sex, they withered up the most truculent of male hecklers, and gave some indication of what a lively affair they could make of Parliament. My sympathies swayed pendulum-like between them and their opponents, for both sides could put over heavy ammunition and leave one mentally wandering in No Man's Land. I think I am still there to-day. One of the last celebrities I heard was Mr Winston Churchill, who scintillated from under a Liberal hat. At that time it seemed to have no characteristics of the chameleon.

For many weeks during the summer, work was slack at the factory, and we were put on short time. This meant 'more freedom to play, with a reduction in pay'—neither of which circumstances appealed to me very much, except in so far as it gave me a chance to visit the Central Law Courts and learn something about legal procedure. But I must have been a bold youth to enter those courts, for knowing nothing about the public gallery, I used to walk past the forbidding bobbies in the entrance hall and then straight into number one or number two court behind anybody who was passing through. No doubt the ushers thought I was a witness or a solicitor's clerk, and allowed me to sit among the privileged people who had a more definite share in the proceedings. There I sat for many a full day and willingly forfeited my dinner to hear the forensic skill of lawyers, the clear, cold summing-up of the judge and the sentence following the jury's verdict of guilty. But what a formidable display of juridical power was set against the offenders in the dock, as if the whole vengeance of society was concentrated in that solemn conclave to punish a derelict youth for outraging the

sanctity of private property. Poverty was never accepted as an excuse for crime but 'respectability,' expensive counsel, and influential pleadings had an extraordinary effect in softening the law.

The sex urge is the most disturbing factor with which a young man has to contend. It flows into every channel of thought and keeps on asking: 'What are you going to do about it?' however much he tries to hold it back. If his sexual knowledge is of the rudimentary kind that breaks through the 'hush-hush' policy of elder brethren, he will answer the irritating question by either secret masturbation or by ascetically idealizing the sex act and repressing his natural instincts. My reaction to the vulgar life of the factory was to choose the latter course and to go all out for the ideal of true manhood, the primary virtues of which were to honour all womanhood and to indulge no sex impulse whatever outside the marriage sphere. And the Alliance of Honour existed to support my trend of thought and from my early teens to claim me as an ardent worker and propagandist for the cause of personal purity. I digested all the literature that came from the London headquarters and became a branch secretary with my own headquarters in the bedroom. At that time the scourge of venereal disease was giving rise to public alarm and meetings were arranged by the Alliance to warn men of the dangers of sexual vice. Eminent doctors detailed the horrors of syphilis and the harmful results of masturbation, which caused a number of men to faint, through what I believed a distressed conscience, arising from vicious habits. That I was able to listen without feeling funny was a tribute, I thought, to my clean life and to the splendid example I set to the rest of the audience. But this exalted view of chastity was not without its danger, for I came to ennoble womanhood beyond the human context and to fear sexual intercourse because of the possible

evil consequences. The book that influenced me most in this direction was Sylvanus Stall's, *What a Young Man Ought to Know*, which I accepted as the guiding testament of youth in all matters of sex knowledge. But I had to learn how extravagant ideals and the constant repression of sex instinct can divorce one from life's realities and reap a harvest of pain and torment in the after years. Every woman I saw as the incarnate expression of purity; masturbation shone in the glassy eyes of youths, and prostitution was due to the immoral sinfulness of man. The double standard of morals that men had set up for themselves was an iniquitous slur against women and lowered the self respect of both sexes. But if my conduct was

Chaster than crystal on the Scythian cliffs.

my thoughts could not escape the natural passions of the body. The swish of a white petticoat aroused my interest and I lay on the pillow at night mentally engrossed in shameful forms of sex imagery. Thus I was torn by a painful conflict of emotions, for the more I tried to sublimate sex energy in chaste endeavour the more inclined I was to find an outlet through the channels of the imagination. I remember, for instance, putting out the light in my bedroom and peeping through the curtains for no end of a time at a window opposite, through which could be seen the dim outline of a woman undressing. The sex suggestions of this shadowy picture were more difficult to resist than the need of sleep or the attractions of a book I might be reading.

Though I never regretted avoiding masturbation and sexual indulgence, my idolatrous worship of saintly chastity and of 'the white flower of a blameless life,' circumscribed my thought and attention in too lofty a region to be of much practical use. Sir Galahad in search of the Holy Grail could scarcely be expected to write a political thesis or effectively to interest editors on worldly affairs. The abstract ideal of true manhood

turned up in my creative efforts like a King Charles's head, so that most of my youthful poetic effusions (on which I counted securing immortal fame) have more merit in the manner than the matter of their achievement. Inspiration started very early in the day. Instead of going straight to the factory before the sun was up, I wandered 'lightly as a cloud' round the quiet streets of Edgbaston, full of the romantic murmuring of the trees and the joyous twittering of the sparrows and of the golden rays of dawn burnishing the house-tops. And as I felt a kindred soul to all the eternal beauty of life and to a state of moral excellence beyond the world's sin and stain, my ecstasy found expression in rhymes that periodically caused me to stop and duly enter in a note-book, after the suspicious manner of a private detective. The meditations then continued in the factory, where I sat at the bench for hours on end, mechanically doing my work and oblivious to all the actions and talk going on. When sufficient stanzas were stored up in my mind for commitment to paper, I disappeared into the warehouse, and in a quiet recess scribbled out the lines before returning to Parnassus. Once I was observed by Jack Brough, gazing into space like one under transfiguration, and mistaking my poetic mood for arrested mentality, he ungraciously kicked the stool from under me to test his theory, and as he said, 'to bring me to earth.' He succeeded in the latter respect.

Youth is also a time for religious enthusiasm and I did my best to sustain a sense and spirit of holiness in striving after true manhood. But when I came to read books on theology and to reason out the validity of dogma, my faith and religious views began to change accordingly. I wanted something more vital and expansive than the ritual of St Asaph's Church and so I attended the Young Men's Early Sunday Morning Class at the Bristol Road Schools. The speakers were generally men of social importance who set the Christian seal on

all subjects under discussion, and as the class, like many others in the town, was sponsored by the Cadbury family, its tendency was decidedly Liberal. This kept criticism to the colour of pale pink, for to have treated the evils of the day with a doctrine of deeper complexion would have disturbed the religious harmony that governed the proceedings. I felt the class was a pleasant anodyne for unprogressive thought and gave me neither spiritual nor intellectual satisfaction. So I transferred my membership to the Young Men's Class in connection with the Old Meeting Unitarian Church, and at once found an atmosphere that was to have a great influence on my life.

The class was founded and run by a Mr Cross, who was an elderly business man in affluent circumstances. Short of stature and with a long, flowing beard, he was the image of one of those old men to be seen in the pictures of Blake or in the biblical paintings of the Italian masters. He had a cultured mind and such an attractive personality for the young that no one coming under his influence could fail to put more sweetness and nobility into life. Yet his character had been moulded out of tragedy—an early tragedy of losing his young fiancée on the threshold of marriage and of compelling him through sorrow to face a lonely future.

Instead of trying to stuff our minds with partisan denominational dogma, he showed how religion could be made a living reality by associating our thoughts with the noblest achievements of mankind and by drawing out the best that was within us. After the drab routine of the week, it was a constant delight to join the hundred young men each Sunday morning. I was carried into realms of spiritual ecstasy where brotherhood was more than a dream and where the fulness of life shone above the evil and cares of the world like a sun in a cloudless sky. He also encouraged us to treat him as a confidential friend to whom we could take all our troubles and trials and count on getting the help and advice that

no words can repay. Many of the boys who took up occupations in different parts of the world were especially grateful to him for the guidance they received.

The home of Mr Cross at Handsworth was the centre of the social life of the class and pleasant were the occasions when parties of us gathered to play billiards, join in an impromptu concert, or to study the rareties of the wonderful garden. But more wonderful still was the collection of pictures that covered the walls of every room. He also sponsored the work of young local artists, whose pictures he brought to public notice by loaning them to the Birmingham Corporation for exhibition.

Then there were the sporting attractions of the class which Mr Cross fostered to link up healthy bodies with healthy minds. A ground was provided for football and cricket, and graded teams enabled most of us to indulge our talents in competitive exercise. And though I never excelled in the sporting heavens I was a sufficiently good satellite to keep a place in the team and to issue forth on Saturday afternoons with second-hand flannels and brand new hopes to 'stump a few behind the wickets,' and to knock up the twenty-five runs that would get me the half-crown of prize money offered by Mr Cross. When I did accomplish the feat and triumphantly made known the fact to our benefactor on the following morning, an irritating diversion took place that caused him to delay dropping the coin forthwith into my hand and then to forget about it altogether. Ah, cruel fate, not to give me the courage to ask for it again and to leave me at the mercy of a slender hope to hit another twenty-five runs as a reminder, until my cricketing career faded out without further triumph.

The spiritual satisfaction I received from the unorthodox nature of Mr Cross's class soon brought me into contact with the Old Meeting Church. I had already been the round of churches and chapels in the town to find a religious anchorage, but as none of the



preachers seemed to have a human message it was refreshing to find a church where the treatment of social problems was more important than the propagation of theological obscurities. As a Unitarian centre the Old Meeting Church lived up to its tradition of freedom and toleration, and the first sermon I heard preached by the Rev. Lloyd James gave such a 'sweet reasonableness' to the Christian (or should I say the Unitarian?) doctrine that I soon began to read up the works of Channing, Martineau, and other expositors of the faith. Following their line of scriptural interpretation was like being pulled out of a morass of unorthodox perplexities, wherein the voice of reason could not be heard. I favoured the idea of a single godhead ruling the universe instead of a trinity of beings whose precise relationship to one another could not be intelligibly explained. More reasonable was it to think of Christ as an ordinary inspired man with human attributes, instead of as the supernatural Son of God, sent on earth to be the victim of a cruel preconceived crucifixion which a merciful all-powerful Deity could certainly have avoided. If God deliberately staged this sorry spectacle as the only means of human redemption, then either His good taste was at fault, or His powers to expunge sin from the heart of man must be limited.

But while the Old Meeting Church was the forum for outspoken criticism of both theological and social problems that helped to humanize religious belief, the class distinction of the members gave an air of shallow formality to much of the worship. The influential section of the congregation included ex-mayors, councillors, and wealthy business people who came in luxurious motor cars to occupy upholstered pews in central positions to hear the preacher's condemnation of class inequalities, slums, exploitation of the workers, and other evils of the day. As strikes and labour unrest increasingly darkened the industrial outlook so the minister preached more passionately on behalf of the workers and gave the

church the atmosphere of a court wherein the employers sat listening in the dock to indictable offences against the law of humanity. But none of them seemed to have a sense of guilt or to be affected in any way by what the preacher said. I often expected someone to jump up and shout: 'I protest,' when probably I should have thought: 'what a splendid employer;' but no, they entered the church with dignity, stepped back into their cars with dignity, and doubtless it was with dignity if next day they told the trade union leaders to go to hell. And being of the élite, the proletarian flavour of the evening service was not for them. This was chiefly attended by the humble and meek who ran the Sunday School classes and did most of the social work of the church. Among these was an elderly man who used to shuffle in after the service had commenced and occupy a seat in the shadowy part of the transept, where his flaming nose compelled a certain amount of juvenile attention. By an odd coincidence he came in one winter's evening just as the minister was intoning: 'Let your light so shine before men,' etc., which almost screwed me up with suppressed laughter. But I liked the warmth and friendliness of these evening services, for when the common people are gathered together there is a bond of natural simplicity that stands in direct contrast to the sophistication of the moneyed classes. The latter will write out cheques, attend sumptuous charity balls and banquets, and pose an impressive regard for human causes in council and committee, but if there is hard voluntary work to be done that means tired feet and the soiling of hands, then this part is generally left for the common people to perform.

That it was not given to the wealthy members of the Old Meeting Church at that time to be severely tested, does not alter the fact that the class spirit was highly dominant, and kept an almost unbridgable gulf between the different sets of worshippers. Perhaps it was well that

the gulf existed, for as the managing director of the firm that employed me happened to be one of the members on the privileged side it would have been an embarrassing situation for him to have consorted with me under the canopy of the church, and then to have discovered that I donned the workman's apron in his factory during the week. His aloofness was sufficient barrier to prevent a single word passing between us all the years I was there.

I nevertheless took an active part in the work of the church and became a Sunday School teacher. Happily, the class of small boys I was called on to manage could be weaned from the general disorder of the school by descriptive stories from the Old Testament, the thrilling tales of Kingsley's heroes, and the recital of narrative poetry. If the discipline was upset, it was because little impish fingers would persist in coming under the dividing curtain of the next class and pinching whatever legs of my attentive scholars were within reach. So to create a deeper impression on my young friends I acknowledged my nineteenth birthday by buying a bowler hat and a varnished walking-stick with a nickle top. But this first bowler hat was to set the trail of much youthful distress. In deference to factory habit I wore the cloth cap during the week, well knowing the jeers and derision that would have followed the wearing of the more respectable hat. But on Sunday I refused to be denied the dress of my choice, and though I bravely ventured out under my new headgear, I dreaded meeting the young sprites of the factory, who, when they met me, were only too eager to enliven the working hours by poking fun at 'Garratt's tit for tat' and my 'posh pimple,' while I wilted and waned under extreme embarrassment. I might have retaliated by giving the principal aggressor a thump on the nose but I decided that the best form of defence was to extend the use of my bowler hat to every night of the week until it ceased to be a novelty to these young critics. In consequence, the cap and the bowler came to signify two distinct attitudes of mind and

expressions of personality. I was ashamed of the cap, not only because it was too plebeian for my taste but chiefly because it represented an unmanly surrender to the dictates of the factory and the group mind, the ugly features of which I heartily detested. And as most of my friends of the Sunday morning class had office jobs that enabled them always to be well dressed, I felt a lowering of pride and self-respect if I met them in my factory attire. So I skunked round the back streets in going to and from my work and welcomed the dark evenings when my identity was more easily covered up. Under the cap I was despondent, inferior, and a seeker after the shadows, but under the bowler hat, my other self emerged and I walked the highway with self-assurance and on equal terms with the whole world. No doubt I was afflicted with the sort of snobbery that can often be associated with the inexperience and pride of youth, but I record the facts as an example of the influence of clothes on character and to suggest that in the sociological study of the subject the breaking down of self-respect by having constantly to wear shabby clothes might well be found to have an important bearing on juvenile crime.

During the warm summer months the call of the country was too strong to be resisted, and I forfeited the attractions of school and church to tramp the open spaces in company with a few friends on whose association I look back with the utmost pleasure. Immediately Sunday dinner was over we rushed to the outskirts of the city, took off our coats, and started a long trek between the scented hedgerows and under sunny skies and sang our way to remote villages like the happy minstrels of old. As the lanes were not then invaded by motor cars, it was possible to share the song of the birds and the fragrance of flowers and to harmonize one's thought with the beauties of nature.

Nor can I forget those afternoon teas in the gardens of old thatched cottages, where we turned in all dusty and hot, with the wasps skirmishing round our perspiring faces, and the cool, refreshing water of the pump pouring over our heads before we sat down to the stacks of bread and butter and endless cups of tea. Then with the benediction of kindly old faces to set us on the way, we started off full of renewed spirit and energy which served to animate the tramp with lively discussions on ragtime music, the character of Lloyd George, beer-drinking, and prostitution. It is strange how walking towards a town seems to excite a different frame of mind from that created by leaving it. We generally approached Birmingham in hot debate of problems that would have been sacrilege to discuss while advancing on the country, as if a subtle magnetism operated between environment and mind. What I am more sure about is that these week-end hikes over the fields and lanes of the Midland shire put strength into my lungs and joy into my heart which fortified me against the poisons and depressions of work-a-day life.

My closest companion was Eric Brown, an ambitious youth who had to contend against a distressing family life. His father was afflicted with a wasting disease which had taken away the use of his legs and hands. I have seen nothing more ruthless in nature than the way the physical resources of this man were gradually eaten up while his mental strength remained intact, as if to increase the torment of his being drawn towards the grave. I nevertheless, spent many pleasant hours in his company discussing political and literary subjects. But it was most uncanny to talk to a man in this condition, for his mind was being left high and dry as his body wasted away. Though I never discussed the matter with his son, I often thought that his was an unmistakable case for the humane adoption of euthanasia. Another invalid whom I used to visit was a bed-ridden uncle of a friend, who liked a good argument.

Uncle was a middle-aged man, who had spent over seventeen years on his back and had amassed a tremendous amount of knowledge from the library of books that covered every wall. Most subjects he could discuss with amazing clearness, but his favourite topic was Comparative Religion, which enabled him to strike at orthodox Christianity and to extol the good points of Brahminism, Mohammedanism, and the teachings of Confucius. He ridiculed the Christian idea of Divine Revelation and maintained that the Bible was a collection of ordinary literary documents of a much later date than other religious writings, and certainly not more infallible.

A sardonic grin would break over his face as he would talk something like this:

'If blood-lust gets people to heaven, then the place must be packed with Christians already. The history of Christianity is brimful with more shameful cruelty and blood-spilling than can ever be set against the heathen races, whose idols have no blood-red banners to stream afar in glorification of their worshippers' deeds. A dripping sword has brought the Bible down through the centuries and given Christ the character of an unscrupulous general leading fanatical hosts of idolators to ways of death and destruction to enforce his dictatorship. Man learns moral goodness by the knowledge of experience, just as he learns to control environment by a similar process, but this has been so stifled by the bigoted domination of the Church that the cardinal virtues which make for brotherly love and tolerant understanding have had to force their way through a welter of blood and suffering in defiance of Christian authority.

'No other writings in existence have more inflamed the basest passions of man than the Scriptures. For over four centuries the Holy Inquisition held its ghoulish sway over parts of Europe, torturing and murdering with all the fine art of inspired sadism. Hail, Torquada! brandishing the torch of apostolic succession in

the chambers of horror of the Roman Catholic Church. Imagine a mother, a sister, or your own sweetheart suddenly being scooped up on suspicion of heretical thinking, and taken down into a dungeon of the earth to be brutally tortured. The heavy door closes, and though you stand panic-stricken beneath the eyes of heaven there is no escape from the grim silence which tells you that the devils underneath are breaking the bones or burning with red-hot irons the body of your beloved one, whose agonized shrieks are confined to feed the emotions of sex-starved priests. And when you have thought of her mangled to the point of death by pain-creating devices that only satanic minds could invent, think of the tens of thousands of other victims who were tortured to establish "God's will upon earth." Then, with the blood rushing to his cheeks, he exclaimed: 'Savages have got the mercy to kill outright; and primitive man swiftly brought death with the swing of a club, but Christian fanatics can be connoisseurs in cruelty and delay death until the maximum human suffering has been attained. If you can read the history of the Inquisition and remain an orthodox Christian, then I overrate the intelligence I think you have.'

As my knowledge of the subject was fragmentary, I took refuge in the assertion that ideas were limited in those days and that at any rate the Church had thrown off the evil mentality of the past and had adapted its teaching to true Christian principles. But this argument only made 'uncle' more bitter.

'The Church still refuses to live up to the message of its Founder. Just as the Inquisition was conceived and operated by the most enlightened deacons of the day, so the present hierarchy of Christendom have to be kept in check by the State, lest any more devilish domination should happen again. As it is, the Church will back any murderous war and foster any amount of slaughter in protection of its pomp and power, and so far as the Roman Catholics are concerned, well, they

would rekindle all the fires of Smithfield if they had half a chance. The diabolical creed that to mitigate human suffering is to flout the Will of God, has given the Church the distinction of specializing in cruelty and in the infliction of unnecessary pain. With the old instruments of torture still jangling in their ears and with minds still fascinated by the writhing bodies of innocent old witches being burned to a cinder, it was hardly likely that Christian dignitaries should take easily to the use of chloroform and antiseptics to allay the tortures of the operating-table. I have had ministers of the Church come into this room to prepare my soul for the mansions of the blest, without a thought of my suffering body lying here mortally damned. No, my boy, we have to look to heretical scientists to apply Christian principles, for the Church only dopes the people with superstitious quackery.' And so he went on, inveighing against orthodox religion with a fine frenzy, evidently embittered, but with a directness of language that kept me attracted. I could not imagine a death-bed repentance from 'uncle' even if the Archbishop of Canterbury had come to intercede. As he often said, if he could call up Tom Pain's spirit to see him off, he would enter the valley with a smiling face.

Other companions I like to remember, are Vickerstaffe, who played the violin, and Horace Shepherd, who carried his musical talent into the heart of London. Horace was a prodigy at the piano and could play the most difficult music from memory. As the wireless had not arrived to stifle the creative effort in the home, we had many delightful evenings playing and singing; we supplemented our knowledge by attending the orchestral concerts that were given frequently at the town hall.

If we went to the theatre to see a musical comedy I was reminded of my younger and poorer days when I used to wait at the gallery entrance of the Grand Theatre and cadge the half-time ticket from a person who preferred the pub to the second half of the show. Then I



sat entranced by the lovely form of Marie Studholme and was not at all surprised that young dukes hung around the stage-door and planned romantic elopements with the pretty chorus girls. On one occasion I ventured into the gallery of a low-down music hall that was notorious for its Saturday night skirmishes, and during an uproar saw a young ruffian crash a beer bottle over the head of an attendant and knock him unconscious.

On Sunday evenings we promenaded the Bristol road, which was a favourite rendezvous for lads and lasses engaged in the gentle art of flirtation. Fully arrayed in bowler hat, flash walking-stick, and a buttonhole of pink carnations, we exchanged the 'glad eye' with parties of picturesque girls, to whom we never dared speak until we had passed by them about a score of times. And though nothing more ensued than flippant talk and generous laughter, it gave a healthy outlet to awakening sex consciousness.

Casual flirtation, however, was not what I wanted; I looked for a girl capable of intelligent conversation; one who could be a confidential friend with a lofty purpose in life. As serious courtship was out of the question (I had far too many other plans for that), the difficulty was to find a girl who would understand the position, for I observed that when any one of them started to 'walk out' with a young man, she clutched his arm as if intent on dragging him to the altar. I was dismayed to find that most young girls went about in twos, and that the few who ventured out alone seemed far too dignified and important for me. But I duly appeared on lovers' walk in contemplation of passing faces, whose cold indifference reminded me only too painfully of the disapproval of my daring plan to attract a girl without the help of a companion. Yet the miracle happened. I caught her eye a number of times as she passed in the crowd, and when at last there came just a suspicion of a smile, my spirits rose with the courage of a conqueror and I resolved on a reckless advance.

No one else mattered during those vital moments, and I am sure that if the rest of the crowd had fallen dead, I should have rushed over their bodies to her, raised my hat, and wished her 'Good evening,' with a tremendous fear that I might be repulsed. I was not. All graciousness and smiles, I was soon walking beside her entranced by her radiant presence and the delicate perfume of her dress. No heavy cosmetics to outrage the natural gifts of beauty.

If I agreed with all she said and gave her flashing eyes almost embarrassing attention it was because I saw her as the Anthea of my dreams for whom I was prepared to live and die. But dreams are formed to be trodden on and the scent and colour of the rose have to be enjoyed for what they are and not for what one would have them be, and so she passed into the unknown as a vision of delight to my aesthetic eye but with my ideal sense of companionship unsatisfied. I decided I was out of step on lovers' walk.

One day I received word at the factory that my sister Constance was dangerously ill. It had been my practice to meet her on the way to school and to buy her sweets as a token of brotherly affection. I hastened to the bedside and found her shrieking with pain, her hands and feet swollen to twice their normal size. Pitifully, she cried for me to try and ease her torture, but the most I could do was to comfort her in my arms and let her tears fall over my face, so that her last moments on earth should be as gentle and loving as I could make them. The doctor was due to arrive at any moment but as often happens the moments passed too quickly for him to be of any help, and not having the attention to which a sick child is entitled in this wealthy world, death brought a merciful release to her stricken body. It also released my own furious feelings against the circumstances of her death. Bubbling over with anger, I rushed off to see the doctor and told him that my sister had died through sheer neglect. I said that she had

received no proper nourishment and attention since the beginning of her illness, and that my father ought to be prosecuted. I said that a dog would have had better treatment than this child received and hinted that the doctor himself was not free from blame. Patting me on the shoulder he tried to hush me up with coaxing phrases, but overwrought with rage, I was not easily composed. No doubt there was much exaggeration in what I said, but under the circumstances I would not have recanted a single word on pain of death. I was protesting on behalf of the dead.

At the funeral I met my father for the first time since I had left home. We managed to be polite to each other. Not even the grief of death could soften my feelings towards him, which he had already tested by sending to borrow money for horse-racing purposes. As I lived up to the homily, 'neither a borrower nor a lender be,' the request was refused, and I still take a pride in applying a rule that makes for better purse-control and a strengthening of personal responsibility. This enabled me to help my sisters, one of whom I often found waiting at the factory gates to speak to me of some trouble. I determined never to be without a reserve of cash for these emergencies, and though my wages only rose gradually, by careful living and the exercise of thrift I was able to put by something every week in the Post Office Savings Bank. But I might have made more progress had I not been so hostile towards my job and to the foreman under whom I worked. As a boy, I was in his best books, ran all his errands, and enjoyed the privilege of being called by my christian name. But I imagined I was being held back and not given the type of work to which I was entitled. At the age of twenty-one I became a full-fledged trade unionist on the standard rate of pay and as the piece-work jobs were the most profitable, I demanded my full share from the very outset. When this was not forthcoming, I worked myself up into a righteous fury, sailed into the foreman's

office, and in the presence of the works manager, bitterly complained about the unjust victimization. As there was no bond of affection between the foreman and the manager I soon gained the latter's sympathy but was blotted out of the good books of the foreman for evermore. I had started a feud that made me increasingly unhappy.

But there were some shop-mates of mine whose good companionship I am happy to remember, for they were good examples of the working-class. There was Joe Davis, who invariably entered the factory with great dignity and an umbrella and with such a large pipe that he said it kept his feet dry. Joe was an elderly man of downright character and proud of his craft, for on the strength of long experience he could make anything from a saucepan to a stove without the aid of compass or pattern. And, as Joe liked snuff, it was a common sight to see half a dozen men round him dipping into his box and cracking jokes with hilarity. Steady, conscientious, and a good husband and father, Joe was on good terms with the world in general, but as he was approaching seventy years of age, and had served for over half a century in helping to build up industrial Britain, I wondered what recompense awaited him when he became too old to carry on and to be of profitable use to his employers. Joe was a blue-blooded Conservative in politics, but he raised his hat to the Liberal Old Age Pension Scheme that was about to be put into operation. Another character was Jack Brough, who was a pleasant little man with a long walrus-moustache and policeman's flat feet. Jack had once been a Sunday School teacher, but had become so disgusted with what he called the 'hypocritical vice' of Christendom that he now travelled in the opposite direction and derided the Church with fervour. His pet aversion was the Salvation Army, which he described as the Robber Gang that filched the pennies of the poor to keep a horde of commissioned officers in comfortable positions. The call to repentance should be made to the rich and not the poor and needy,

whose 'sinfulness,' he maintained, had more a social than personal guilt. Poverty was the chief asset of the Army and therefore the leaders made little effort to try to abolish it. But Jack brightened up his indignation by relating the story of the converted lass who was publicly testifying to her own improvement.

'Before I was rescued by the Salvation Army,' she said, 'I was a down-trodden sinner with no shoes to my feet and only rags to my body. Now I have good shoes and stockings and white petticoats and drawers—haven't I, captain?' at whom she looked with natural simplicity. But Jack's heresy was not only ecclesiastical, for when he was suspected of 'splitting' to the foreman about the bad craftsmanship of another worker, the latter promptly punched him on the nose and brought the blood gushing over his moustache. Both combatants had to pay a fine into the hospital fund.

There was relatively little trouble, however, considering the scope for personal jealousies and for 'keeping right' with the foreman by shady tactics. The economic pressure to keep a job was strong enough, but when a livelihood can be followed with reasonable security the majority of workers show a quality of character that cannot be over-estimated. I am writing at a time when tens of thousands of able-bodied men have neither livelihood nor security to influence the best sides of their character but the adverse conditions of unemployment to face. This breaks down self-respect and demoralizes a man to the point when he becomes an easy target for the critics who have never known the pangs of want or the boredom of enforced idleness. Work-shies exist in all classes of society but it is safe to say that unemployment is against the natural inclination of men. The majority of workers prefer to live up to the social responsibilities dependent on employment, but when the struggle for existence savours of the life of the jungle and the scramble for jobs is so keen that thousands of young men have not had a chance to work at all it is

folly to expect high standards of moral rectitude to flourish. Rather is it amazing that so many workless are able to retain a civic sense and a law-abiding attitude under the strain of prolonged unemployment.

With no National Unemployment Fund to fall back upon, the 'sack' was something to be dreaded in my early days and every effort was made to cling to a job. Skilled workmen took a pride in their craft, and gave the lie to the ignorant jibe that trade unionism protected the 'duds' and levied a premium on efficiency. As most of the men were paid (as they are to-day), on a piece-work basis, the amount of wages depended on earning capacity, and one had to be efficient before one could be recommended for trade union membership. Trade unionism protects rather than destroys efficiency.

On reaching my twentieth birthday I had twenty pounds in the bank and a burning desire to launch out into some other kind of employment. Journalism was my dream, and I practised my hand at writing articles and tempting the editors of popular periodicals. My first success in print was in the form of a letter which appeared in the *Birmingham Daily Mail*, under the heading of 'Consumption and Ventilation,' and from which I take the following extract to give the gist of what was written:

Legislation has done very little in securing to the closely-confined employee conditions which will enable him or her to breathe sufficient pure air in the space of a working day, with the result that a big portion of our factory hands become victims to consumption every year. The writer is one who has been compelled to work under such conditions at a large factory where over four hundred hands are employed, and also was one of a deputation appointed to hand certain recommendations to the works manager in order for them to be passed on, subject to his approval, to the managing-director. They never reached the last-named, however, because to use the manager's phrase, 'To carry them out would mean a cost of at least £50.' A few weeks afterwards the head of the firm died and left nearly £500,000.

The thrill I derived from the publication of this letter soon turned to despondency when I realized that I was not on the way to Fleet Street the following day. Happily, my ambitions were versatile, for I was prepared to try any sort of enterprise that would free me from the factory. Youth had often set out with a shilling in his pocket and conquered worlds—what ought I not to achieve with twenty pounds in the bank! I had noticed that partnerships often required no greater amount than this, so I replied to one advertisement that seemed to offer a short cut to prosperity. The advertiser lived in a residential part of the town and I was invited to go and talk the matter over with him. The matter was the sending of superannuated horses to Belgium, for the laudable purpose of turning them into mince-meat, and my prospective partner painted a glowing picture of the handsome returns I should get by investing my savings in the new company that was about to be formed. Fortunately, I had taken a keen interest in this scandalous traffic of old horses that had been exposed in the press, and I was angered by having come across a man whose flexible ethics showed that he would stop at nothing in order to make money. I therefore cross-examined him on the cruel aspects of the trade and pointed out the callous treatment these 'old warriors' received as soon as they left our shores. The upshot was that I was nearly put out of the house, but I still had my twenty pounds and a high regard for old horses. I decided to say good-bye to partnerships and all that.

But the conflict between factory and my inclinations went on. I hated the nightly return to my lodgings in the cloth cap and smelly clothes and with a loaf or a packet of sugar under my arm to fill the gaps in the larder. Finding it cheaper to board myself I also insisted on preparing my own meals and adopting an exaggerated sort of self-help that was not altogether complimentary to my old landlady. But there was some excuse for

this as I had such a contempt for the petting and pampering of her bachelor son (a man over forty), that I found relief in posing as a disciple of the other extreme. I was also rather envious of Archie because he had a well-paid job that enabled him to go to dances in evening-dress and to bring a taxi right up to the door. And what infernal swank he had, by Jove! Groomed like a young duke of Belgravia he reached the oleaginous heights that caused the dome of his head almost to melt in the gaslight and his little waxed moustache to show strain in preserving extreme rigidity. Then under a black cloak and top hat and with a silver-knobbed stick, he swept out of the house with majestic bearing and left me wondering to what order of the nobility he would appear to his dancing partner to belong. But the next morning being Sunday, Archie made a remarkable descent in the social scale, for he came down without collar and tie and amused himself with an old Edison-Bell phonograph that nasalled out the tunes with tremendous vigour. Always the little gentleman, he treated me with cold courtesy on normal occasions but warmed up to tropical heat whenever I favoured him with a little flattery.

Archie's mother was a model of dignity and Victorian pride. Neatly dressed in the black satins becoming to her age, I found her every evening enthroned in a creaky basket-chair ready to engage me in conversation on all the topics of the day. But there was an initial difficulty I had to overcome. She would have a shaggy-haired mongrel seated on her lap, which mingled a strong canine odour with that of my gaseous clothes and rendered the atmosphere somewhat unsavoury. Perhaps she preferred the dog's contribution to that of my own, in which case she showed herself to be, as in most other things, the soul of discretion. A true-blue Conservative, she knew the lineage of the royal family from A to Z, and dogmatically foretold the war that would have to be fought to crush the menace of German Militarism.



Another of her aversions was the Scotch, whom she disdained, through having a son-in-law who lauded the glories of Bannockburn. Unfortunately, her constant retort 'Remember Flodden' left her Highland relative unabashed and unashamed. My own differences of opinion were easily wiped out by a matchless apple-pie which she served up at Sunday dinner.

A memorable event was the party I arranged in celebration of my twenty-first birthday. To show my good landlady what talented friends I had I invited all who could make some musical contribution to the programme of the evening. And what a splendid little orchestra was formed with Brown and Vickerstaffe as violinists, Clarke as a 'cellist, and Horace Shepherd at the piano. Never before had the ceiling of that little parlour been so tested by reverberating sound, and during the most hectic moments I could not help feeling thankful that my landlady was partially deaf. To add zest to the proceedings I also hit upon the happy idea of inviting girls who were strangers to the boys, which gave rise to such a wholesome blending of the sexes that one matrimonial event at least, had its source in that gathering. Indeed, Cupid would have been an indolent lad if he had not shown some activity that evening, for there was sufficient brightness and beauty and supporting talent to tempt him to draw his bow many times. With another confederate, I thundered out *Watchman, What of the Night?* followed by Shepherd playing Chopin's *Polonaise* on the piano, followed by violin and 'cello solos before the grand orchestral accomplishment of *The Spring Song*. Then came charades and reciting and expansive laughter and merriment which put us in splendid humour for the equally expansive feast that had been prepared. And if in toasting one another we reserved the most vociferous for my kind old landlady, it was to show genuine appreciation for all she had done.

Gay, youthful laughter to greet the dawn of manhood; fair cheeks and flashing eyes and hearts brimful with

love and praise for the good things life had to offer; yes, ours was the sunshine before the storm, the song of the bird before the deathly drone of other wings charging down the night. The whisperings of war were growing into dark press headlines, though few of the common people thought seriously that the disaster would come. And least of all the young men and women who retained a roseate view of life and worked and schemed to live up to it. The slight memories we had of the Boer War were steeped in the heroics rather than in the horrors of the conflict, and we inherited the mental inertia of putting our destiny in the doubtful hands of politicians and the ruling powers that be. I remember how those young merry-makers laughed their way out of my lodgings on that February night and went their separate ways as if to meet the dawn. Some of them were shortly to meet the sunset on the fields of Flanders and to pass over the horizon of mortal existence for ever.

The next morning I woke to the realization that I was a man. For over six years I had struggled on my own to make mental and material progress, and though unfulfilled projects were always there to urge me on, I was not dissatisfied with what I had accomplished. I had studied hard, learnt much from general experience and kept to a healthy line of conduct that strengthened character and the corpuscles of the body. I drank neat cod-liver oil by the pint to allay my fears of catching consumption from the poisonous atmosphere of the factory. I watched that expenditure never exceeded income and was able to increase my banking account by a few shillings every week. And as my wages went up with a bound in accordance with full trade union rates, I received the best practical demonstration of the power of industrial organization it was possible to have.

The public exposure of the 'White Slaves of England,' was still fresh in my mind. I had almost lived the sufferings of the sweated chain workers of Cradley Heath, working at the anvil from dawn to sunset for a

few shillings a week; of the 'proud mothers of England' wielding the heavy hammer with one hand while they clasped a child at the breast with the other, and heard the children's cry for bread that was hardly won by degrading and incessant labour. Often had I pictured the 'white sepulchres' of women enslaved to the poisonous lead industry of the north, through which their bodies were eaten up for a wage that did not allow the victims to have even a decent burial. Then there were the wretched nail-makers of Bromsgrove and the pitiful plight of the sweated seamstresses, and above all the revolting conditions of the chemical factories where the men were gagged with sixteen thicknesses of flannelette to keep them alive, while they practically lived on whisky to create artificial energy. Industrial depravity, indeed, had reached the lowest depth through the lack of a strong trade union organization. But for this mighty bulwark against unrestrained Capitalism, I might have been working twelve or fourteen hours a day for a paltry wage, and become broken in mind and health at a very early age. For what was the power of individual bargaining without the strength of the union to stand by and say: 'we shall protect you against undue exploitation by dictating the minimum terms under which you shall work.' To stem the tide of working-class organization some employers levelled wages up to trade union rates on their own initiative; but as the workers realized that united action was more reliable than individual bargaining, they insisted on trade union membership of men who otherwise enjoyed the advantages of collective effort without having to pay for them. Non-union labour, operating inside a highly organized industry is like a parasitical germ fattening on a body without making any contribution towards its sustenance.

It seemed an anomalous position that I, a young man of twenty-one, should now be receiving nearly twice the amount of wages paid to the labourers, many of whom were married men with children. Harry Wood,

for instance, had a large family to support on less than a pound a week, while 'Old Cock,' a man on the verge of seventy, pushed heavy barrow-loads of iron castings about all day for no greater amount. It was a pathetic sight to see this old man in the winter months struggling in ice and snow to retain his job, and many a nasty fall put him on the sick list for weeks on end. One morning, 'Old Cock' failed to arrive, having entered on eternal retirement, with no extra cost to the firm. His number disc was merely taken off the board.

By the summer of 1913, I was so rebellious against factory life that I decided to make a determined effort to escape. All the men thought I was there for good, for having learnt the trade and joined the union, it was unthinkable that one in my position should kick over the traces. But none of them knew how heartily I detested the grease and smells and the roaring machinery. It made me mentally sick, and to get relief I used to rush to a little balcony on the outside wall of the top shop and breathe deeply of the fresh morning air.

Then a startling thing happened. Eric Brown suggested a four days' trip to Paris entirely on our own, as he was anxious to 'put over' his knowledge of French, and take in more knowledge of the world. I agreed, and off we set with just sufficient money to see us through. Our first thrill was the ride from Euston to Waterloo on the top of a bus, for though we nearly got drenched to the skin by heavy rain the lurid romance of London was much nearer to our thoughts. But it was too fleeting to be of much moment and soon the enchanted city of Paris had taken us to her bosom. Eric's French first came into play when he consigned to perdition the nasty lot of brothel touts that sidled up to us like slimy snakes in search of prey, but the limitation of his linguistic knowledge was not made evident until he attempted conversation with a waiter, who, after patiently listening for a few moments suddenly remarked: 'If you speak English I will better understand.' I envied his capacity to speak

some of the language for all that, and maintained that French should be taught in all elementary schools.

With a map and a tongue and sufficient money to 'tip' your way about it is possible to see the best of Paris in four days. At least we thought so after our whirlwind visits to museums, art galleries, cafés, theatres, parks, boulevards, and the Eiffel Tower. This ascent and the one that resulted in a dizzy scrutiny of the strange gargoyles on Notre Dame really sum up in recollection that first visit to Paris.

The turning-point in my career came in the early part of 1914, when, through a chance conversation with a stranger in the lounge of the Birmingham Central Y.M.C.A., I learned that he was the Midland manager of a London firm of vacuum cleaners, who was putting young men on the road to sell what was then a novel contraption. The job was to sell the article direct to householders on a commission basis, which meant that if you failed to take orders you would certainly succeed in starving. Well, fortified by a small bank balance and a desperate determination to escape from the factory, I was prepared to take the risk, and told the manager bluntly that I was the young man he was looking for, direct from heaven. Of course, he told me I was a fool to throw up a well-paid craftsman's job for the fortuitous life of the road, but as I chose to remain a fool and overwhelmed him with enthusiastic importunities, he did what all good managers ought to do—he gave me the chance to show of what stuff my ambition was made.

'Go and sell the machine in Nottingham,' he said, 'and don't blame me if you jump from paradise into hell.'

Now hell is simply a point of view and generally of a private character, so that when the manager told me to report at his office on the following Monday morning to gain a little local experience before going to Nottingham, I lost no time in quitting the factory, and whatever paradisaical charms it may have had. Mr Baker received

the news as a doubtful compliment to the firm but he sustained his kindness to the last by giving me his blessing and hopes of success. When I passed out of the factory for the last time I felt both exultant over my release and saddened by the farewells of the many shop-mates with whom I had worked for over nine years. That night I almost cried under the strain of mixed emotions. I had taken the leap without knowing precisely where I was going to land.

The next morning I woke up to an entirely new world. No longer a factory 'hand' (a term that implies the absence of soul), I indulged the luxury of lying in bed unresponsive to the seven o'clock bell that now seemed to be ringing in a remote corner of my brain. For years the sound of that bell had quickened my feet and ruled my daily life with slavish uniformity, but now I could stand my ground like a free man, wear a bowler hat in the daytime and surprise my old landlady with the news of my escapade and impending departure. In a few days I was on my way to the manager's office like a gay adventurer who could knock down all the Aunt Sallies of commercial salesmanship, and if need be, sell vacuum cleaners for the sake of charity. In a few minutes I knew all there was to be known about the device, and in company with a more experienced salesman, was soon on the way to tempt the well-to-do housewives of Edgbaston. Our first call was at a pretty large house that certainly had sufficient carpets to warrant a sale. The door was opened by an attractive middle-aged woman who looked the Carmen of actual life. Obviously of Spanish origin, she had jet-black hair over a tawny skin, flashing, deep-set eyes, and a well-proportioned body dressed in half-gipsy fashion, with large ear-rings and necklaces to heighten the effect. My colleague politely expressed the purpose of our visit while the lady in turn politely asked us into the house. The next moment madam was seated in the drawing-room to watch the marvellous extraction of dust from her apparently

dustless carpet, while I 'tuned in' to my first practical lesson of salesmanship.

'This demonstration will prove, madam, that this vacuum-cleaner, apart from its labour-saving value, is an absolutely necessary asset from a hygienic point of view and will be the best five pound investment your husband——'

'My husband!' interrupted madam, with an almost vicious curl of the lip, 'before you waste your time in this house, you had better know more about it.'

'I hope——' stammered out my companion.

'No apologies necessary. I ought to apologize for asking you in. Will you sit down for a few minutes?' We sat down under the penetrating glance of those dark, flashing eyes.

'You have come to a prison, not a house where you can hope to sell anything,' continued madam with deliberation. 'A prison I say, where husband and wife have not spoken a single word to each other for over five years. We eat at the same table and hate one another like poison. Get five pounds from that dirty villain! Ha! he'd rather spend twenty times that amount on his filthy prostitutes than a penny on me. But I'll wear him down, yes, and knife him before he gets the children to turn on me.'

'So you have children?' I said, to break the tension.

Madam sailed into calmer waters.

'Two girls, who are fortunately away at school most of the time. But I'm teaching them to hate the swine, and that gets him as good as any dagger, though he——'

'Can't you get a divorce?' inquired my colleague sympathetically.

Madam's lip curled up with redoubled energy.

'No divorce for this child. He would just like me to clear out to let his dirty sluts come in. No, I'm holding on like a leech with full allowance. He's made my life a living hell and I'll damn well make him share it.'

Such was the pent-up fury of this aggrieved woman.

She sat there like a tigerish animal in a sumptuous den, passionately vengeful, and eager to make known her bitterness even to strangers.

'Now you see how I'm placed, and how you are yourselves,' she concluded. 'Splendid things, these vacuum cleaners, but you might as well try and sell them to the dead as waste your time here. I am sorry to have kept you so long.'

We passed through the doorway with madam's eyes set indulgently upon us.

'The happy homes of England,' my colleague ironically commented.

At the end of the week I packed my bags and set off for Nottingham. Eager for fresh fields of conquest, my Swan Song for my native city was not very pronounced, for unknown to my friends, I went off rather like a fugitive of the night without fuss or formality. I was anxious to suck the honey and if need be the hyssop of adventure at all costs and I saw the smoking chimneys of Birmingham fade in the distance with feelings of relief. I entered Nottingham as a stranger, not knowing a single soul in the town or where I was going to live. Standing outside the Central Station I had not the slightest idea which way to move, so I scanned the advertisements of a local newspaper for cheap lodgings and soon presented myself at a small house off Mansfield Road and was instantly accepted.

Mr and Mrs Laycock were a homely couple who possessed a growing daughter and a splendid collie dog called Roy. I loved that dog from the moment I saw him. Perhaps dogs can sense in the eyes of strangers what their attitude is going to be. To prove his affection Roy quietly slipped under the table during the first meal and gently licked my hand. So I pressed his head against my knee as a mark of my good feelings, and that sealed our friendship. My loneliness had evaporated.

Then I set out to raid the Mapperly district of Nottingham with a glib tongue and a vacuum cleaner. Flushed



with enthusiastic zeal I scarcely noticed at first the weight of my sample machine, which, with its accoutrements soon felt like a heavy hod of bricks. But if this was heavy, my heart was light, for I fondly imagined that the overworked housewives of Nottingham were anxiously waiting for this new labour-saving device. The obstacle of the husbands having to pay out five pounds for something they imagined they could do without had not received my serious attention.

My first discovery was that door-to-door salesmanship was an uphill struggle that needed endless patience, courage, and determination. Any illusions I had of warm welcomes and easy sales were soon broken on the wheel of hard experience. To gain the entrée to houses to give the 'free demonstration,' without which sales were impossible, meant talking down the opposition of distrust and feminine incredulity. Doors were banged in my face, some women were rude, while maids returned to say that 'Madam could not be disturbed.' For the first fortnight I had a heartbreaking time in meeting constant negatives and failed to sell a single machine. Hauling my heavy load from door to door and almost supplicating for at least a hearing, I was in turn embarrassed, amazed, and then despondent by the ruthless treatment I received. The few demonstrations I gave were allowed more out of curiosity than a desire to purchase and I returned to my lodgings worn out and depressed, not having earned a single halfpenny for all the effort and energy I had expended during the day.

Though I voluntarily accepted the terms of employment without qualification, I have since been heartily opposed to commercial salesmanship conducted solely on commission basis. As I write, there are thousands of men and women who are driven by economic pressure to hawk goods from door to door on commission terms and to act as advertising agents, and yet receive nothing even to cover their expenses. Whether sales are achieved or not a man's time and effort, besides having

a marketable value, are a contribution to the industry concerned and should be paid for. The 'Knights of the Road,' are not only those who drive big cars and feed on six-course dinners; more numerous still are the 'bag trailers' from door to door and shop to shop, who wage a hopeless war against hunger, heartbreak, and eventually despair. Legislation is needed to prevent commercial sharks from sucking the life-blood of these hard-working salesmen, who are unfortunately disorganized.

Happily, my own disappointments died with the day and I rose hopeful with the dawn. Besides, there was always the warm welcome of Roy awaiting me. After a quiet read in the Arboretum I was thoroughly refreshed, and ready to meet opposition with better understanding and more confidence. It was by overcoming my own errors that I found the road to success.

My first sale was the result of realizing that though I poured all my eloquence on the wife with the view of getting her to say: 'Yes, I will give you an order for a vacuum cleaner,' it was the husband's cheque-book that stood between me and starvation. I therefore adopted the policy of enchanting the wife in the daytime and of calling again after the husband had returned home to a good dinner and a good account of the marvellous achievements of the vacuum cleaner on his precious carpets. And if there were children about, so much the better, for I allowed them to do all the demonstrating and to show such excited delight that the grumpiest father could not hold out long against the united ambition of his family to possess a machine. Though he questioned the claims of his wife, the children left him no loophole for escape, and so I came away with an order in my pocket. Soon I was selling three or four vacuum cleaners a week, which to my dismay, I had to deliver myself after the crates had been sent to my lodgings. I had not counted on that little back garden being used as a dispatching centre for my merchandise, and if I record with thankful remembrance the indulgence shown

by the Laycock family, it is to remind myself how an apparently small kindness can throw off a whole weight of worry and anxiety from another's shoulder. I only wished my employers had been as thoughtful, for apart from the responsibility of soliciting for orders, I was called upon to work with hammer and chisel on crates and then to deliver the machines to customers before the day's work was finished. I slept extremely sound.

The summer of 1914 found Nottingham in festive mood. Mansfield Road was bedecked with flags and bunting and crowds of hilarious people shouted and waved their hats as Queen Alexandra rode up in an open carriage, followed by a cavalcade of horse-guards in bright red uniforms. From under large summery hats the faces of women beamed in the sunshine and the young men from office and shop gaped at the glittering soldiers. Some of the newspapers contained rumours of war but the majority of people continued the even tenor of their way and demonstrated their inherent love of peace. The jingo talk that rose like ominous clouds on the horizon left me unmoved, for a new dawn of life was opening up to me as I became more successful in selling vacuum cleaners, and had more time to romp with the dogs in the forest, watch a cricket match, or to sit composing poetry in the Arboretum.

Not that the reward I got was any fair recompense for my day's output of energy, or that successes yet bore any ratio to the setbacks I received, but being able to pay my way and confident that I was mastering the art of salesmanship, I could afford to enjoy the freedom of responsibility and of regulating my own time. In fact, it became an adventure to make those raids on residential areas and to test my growing knowledge of salesmanship in the spirit of a conqueror. The most galling experience was to get a prospective customer along ninety-nine per cent of the road towards a sale and then to find him as obstinate as a donkey at the crucial point. Many times have I left a house almost in tears after exercising

all my talk and talent to grasp the prize that I had to leave behind. But if this was part of the process of 'going through the mill,' I never allowed the wheels to crush me. I knew too much about the struggle of life already to be easily beaten, so I held a sort of post mortem over every failure to discover the laws of success. This meant practising psychology without knowing much about the theory, and I eventually wrote down and acted on the following rules as a guide to salesmanship.

'Never accept as final a negative answer to a request for an interview until you have thoroughly tested its validity.'

'Be courteous, calm, and cheerful.'

'A steady, confident control in negotiating a sale can often be more effective than a pressing anxiety to force a rapid decision.'

'Ninety-nine per cent of effort is useless without the final unit. Salesmanship is the conquest of that final unit and must not be deserted through either cowardice or despair.'

'A smiling face can be more powerful than a slick tongue.'

'Confidence in the article you are selling will automatically induce confidence in yourself.'

'Accept failures gracefully and successes modestly as there can be no end to the latter so long as you take lessons from the former.'

One day I made a surprise visit to the London headquarters of the firm to declaim against the late delivery of the machines, and poured out my lamentations to a sympathetic director. The revelations I made apparently filled him with dismay, and he earnestly assured me that the world would be put right at the earliest possible moment. I was yet to learn that he was the author of my grievance and knew all about it before I travelled to

London. That was my first lesson in business tact, and helped to raise me from the ranks of the novitiate.

These struggles, however, never released me from the craving for poetry and amateur journalism. When I was not paying poetic tribute to all the beauty of the universe I took up the sociological pen in the interests of suffering humanity. About the scourge of consumption I was particularly concerned and the columns of the *Nottingham Daily Express* seemed open to everything I wanted to say.

Consumption may or may not be hereditary, viewed from a scientific standpoint, but however that may be, it is an undeniable fact that parents suffering from the disease do bring children into the world stricken with the same malady, and that though the disease is held in check for a while such children are generally doomed to a life of misery and suffering from their earliest years. Now as this is common knowledge, the first law which consumptive people should observe is the law of restraint . . . because it is desirable in the interests of the State and of the future generation that the sufferer's race shall not continue after his or her death.

In a letter about the treatment of consumptives in sanatoriums, I wrote:

It is when the patients are allowed, or compelled as they are in most cases, to go back to their old conditions, that such system of treatment proves a failure. It is like helping a drowning man out of water, and then throwing him back again as soon as you have set him on his feet . . . the enormous expense to which the country is put in the upkeep of sanatoria at the present time is out of all proportion to the meagre good they have done, and as many more millions are to be devoted to the same purpose, I consider that a big portion of the money would be better utilized were it spent in placing the poorer patients in surroundings more consistent with those from which they have unhappily obtained only temporary assistance.

On Sunday evenings I went into the old market-place and either helped or hindered the public speakers to espouse various causes. All brands of religious beliefs were hotly debated and grey-haired old men who knew the

Bible from cover to cover, threw up stock questions which they knew had never been and never would be satisfactorily answered. A secularist speaker received more abuse than sensible criticism, but I learned from him the crushing effects of satire, where reasonable argument was futile. I also learned the art of heckling at these meetings; not the foolish obstructionist kind that merely plays into the hands of the speaker, but that which turns a serious observation to the advantage of the opposition. By an interjection at the right moment a speaker could be thrown right off the rails and much amusement caused by rhetorical catastrophies.

'If you want to know what the Conservative Party has done for the working man, look——'

'——inside the work-house.' (Interjection).

'British working-men are being thrown out of jobs by foreign dumping. If we tax these imports the workers will——'

'——pay.' (Interjection).

But the most enlightening moments were spent among the little groups of thinkers who carried on discussions with all the earnestness of a philosopher's council chamber. One subject merged into another, which gave the opportunity for the quidnuncs of economics to hold the torch until it was grabbed by an acolyte of the 'higher criticism' or by an apostle of the 'astral plane.' In the pallid glare of the lamps stood men and women of all stations in life, muffled and collared, dapper and dowdy, listening with either credulous or critical mentality to the arguments, and ready to brighten their faces at the slightest joke and to appreciate the verbal contest of militant erudition. And if there were no all-night sittings at that public parliament, it was more because of legal restrictions than want of enthusiasm, for most of the members stayed till the rising of the 'House' before sauntering away in little groups, when voices and footsteps faded into the night and a happy truce was called for another seven days.

Suddenly the spectre of war began to unfold its wings. The Archduke Francis Ferdinand of Austria had been assassinated, and the Diplomatic Courts of Europe were in a ferment. So far as the common people were concerned they were kept blissfully unaware of what actually was going on, and the trouble in Ireland over Home Rule seemed much more of national importance. Towards the end of July 1914, sinister rumblings sounded through the press, and though the majority of people refused to be scared, excitement began to run high. I continued to sell vacuum cleaners on the assumption that they were more important than guns and battleships, and as so many families seemed to be in agreement, I was contemplating opening up an office in Nottingham, when the news flashed out that war was declared. Mars came striding up the heavens.

Though 4th August 1914 was the fateful day on which governments turned Europe into a slaughter-yard, I am sure that if by good diplomacy Britain had decided not to intervene, a wave of disappointment would have swept over the country. The jingo press had put the smell of blood into the nostrils of the people, and once released to pursue their prey they were in no mood to be called off the trail. Mr Horatio Bottomley could screech: 'To hell with Serbia,' but by that time the German race had been abstracted as a ruthless bully that deserved the earliest knock-out blow by the British lion. And what better sentimental appeal could the public have than the plight of little Belgium falling under the Prussian heel, as if indeed the disregard of smaller nations was something particularly novel in the annals of imperialism. Of secret treaties, machinations of high finance, and the international intrigues of armament kings, ordinary John Bull knew little and thought less, so that when the conflict arrived, the Poet, Politician, and Priest, (the Trinity of the modern State) had little difficulty in stamping mass emotion with the righteousness of our cause. My own reactions were lukewarm,

for though I studied the diplomatic accounts with a patriotic conviction that Sir Edward Grey was a political saint, I was too preoccupied with business diplomacy to make an immediate rush to the recruiting office. I was sufficiently stirred, however, to make an appeal to other people's patriotism in the columns of the *Nottingham Daily Express*.

We therefore hear the clarion call for patriotism. Soldiers and sailors are responding to it in instant mobilization, while all the resources for preventing a possible invasion into this country . . . are being placed at the disposal of the Crown without a moment's hesitation.

The essential need for the larger patriotism will never be more keenly felt than when the horrors of the war fall darker over the land and the struggle for existence reaches its zenith. Will it be then that we shall cry:

When wilt Thou save the people,  
O God of mercy, when?

while it is we who should have saved, were it not for the want of self-sacrifice on our part.

In that August sunshine the recruiting offices were besieged by crowds of men anxious to fight for God, King, and Country. Challenging posters appeared on the hoardings and carmined actresses did a roaring trade in gaining recruits by siren kisses. The khaki uniform promoted the average man to a knight in shining armour, and as detachments of volunteers marched away to the strains of *Tipperary* the frantic farewells of wives and sweethearts recaptured the spirit of the crusades of old. Talk of famine led to raids on the food shops, and profiteers rushed up the prices with 'patriotic' fervour. 'Business as usual,' yelled the newspapers, with a disregard of the unusual amount of business that was soon to raise millionaires from the gutter. But it was not easy for the young men to carry on business as usual without being viewed as shirkers or as the hated



conscientious objectors. Women soon became the best recruiting sergeants.

One evening I went into the Y.M.C.A. reading-room to think the matter over. Presently I got into conversation with a young man of striking literary appearance.

'I'm keen on poetry,' he said after we had discussed the possibilities of the War. 'In fact, that poem published the other day, *Mother of England*, happens to be mine.' Then he spoke of his aspirations in the literary world, and of his hopes of publishing a new volume of verse, 'provided the musket didn't slaughter the Muse.' Then he deplored the materialism of the age and doubted the prospects of earning a living by writing poetry. When I left the young aspirant, who happened to be Cecil Roberts, I felt convinced that he had both the talent and determination to make a mark in the literary world. If I could only keep in step with him. . . .

I persuaded myself that we had been drawn into a spiritual battle of right versus might, that transcended all material motives. The sanctity of treaties and the rights of smaller nations were ideals worth fighting for, and the utmost self-sacrifice was necessary if the cause was to triumph. But what contribution was I to make? Like thousands of other young men I grew uneasy about my position and felt ashamed at remaining in civilian clothes. Then the casualties began to arrive—shattered men on stretchers, and others limping about, that brought the realities of war nearer the doorstep. I remained for days perplexed in mind, undecided what to do.



In relating my experiences of the War I am actuated by a solemn purpose to give an undistorted picture of war as I knew it, while, at the same time remaining loyal to the conceptions I formed as a result of that experience. Happily the tricks of memory cannot play me false, for I am able to draw on a closely written diary which re-creates the daily life of those sad, mad years. The tenacity I exercised in writing this diary under the varied difficulties of active service conditions gives a further reason why I should turn it to fuller account.

The men who went through that great struggle are gradually passing away. Their memories will pass with them unless they have handed the trusteeship to their sons in the form of enlightenment and suitable guidance. If they have done so, will the youth of to-day be so anxious to reach the battle-field as were their fathers of 1914?

I write at a time (1938) when the horrors of the bombing plane are afflicting countries east and west and when the armed camps of Europe are preparing to engulf civilization in the wildest welter of blood and destruction the world has ever known. The prerogative of sacrificing youth on the altar of war must now extend to defenceless old men, women, and children, which shows how the perversion of science has so outpaced the humanistic development of mankind that extinction can become increasingly imminent.

The finest legacy the present generation can leave to its children is a world of active peacemindedness wherein war between nations is looked upon as as antiquated as fighting one's neighbour.

The dream of to-day can become the reality of to-morrow.

### III. War

War is organized murder, pillage, and cruelty.

GORDON.

War is Hell. SHERMAN.

By the middle of August 1914 vast camps were spreading over the landscape and the army authorities were only too glad of the assistance of the Y.M.C.A. in catering for the well-being of the men who were concentrated for military training. As a member of the Association I was asked by the Nottingham Branch to volunteer my services on their behalf, and having a special liking for the work I was glad to make it an alternative to joining up as a combatant soldier. I was strongly averse to killing, though I was quite prepared to throw up my job to serve in some useful capacity for the national cause. In a few days I was travelling to the Isle of Wight to assist a Mr Morgan who was installed in a large encampment a few miles from Newport. The work was gratuitous beyond the payment of bare expenses, and, having forfeited all business interests, I felt I was sacrificing to the limit of my ability.

I found Morgan in glistening perspiration serving cups of tea to crowds of recruits in a large marquee that directly faced Parkhurst Prison. Thousands of Midland men were under canvas, and as the Albany Barracks, the lunatic asylum, and the district workhouse were also in view there was no dearth of local attractions. Our business was to attend to the religious and social welfare of the men who swarmed into the tent as soon as parades were over. The old army 'sweats' who were called upon to turn this raw material into efficient soldiers were not long in battering the illusions of the civilian

mind and in creating a widespread amount of youthful home-sickness. This was expressed in an orgy of letter-writing that kept the tables fully occupied. At night groups of fellows would sit around and join in the chorus of *Love's Old Sweet Song*, *Genevieve*, and *Home Sweet Home*. Some evenings we had a more spirited programme with the aid of Morgan's violin, which was more effective in rousing individual talent among the audience than in promoting music. The men were of all ages and social positions, having come from slum and suburb, office and factory, to drill, eat, sleep, and maybe to die together in the growing spirit of comradeship. How many of these young men could reconcile their cultured and sensitive natures to the bestial art of killing, could be explained, I discovered, by the zest with which they accepted the righteousness of the cause and the avowed aims for which Britain had gone to war. They were partners in a noble crusade and were fully prepared to sacrifice their lives that, by the overthrow of militarism, the world might be made safe for democracy. The Sunday evening service was the occasion for much religious enthusiasm.

The Albany Barracks, on the opposite side of the road, quartered the Warwickshire Regiment of the regular army, which had a notorious reputation for bad behaviour. On Saturday nights the little town of Newport was the scene of excessive drinking, and drunken brawls kept the military police in action. On one occasion a policeman was kicked to death, and I remember going to the small room where the inquest was held. His companion, who had also been severely injured, hobbled in on crutches and was so revengeful in giving evidence against the accused that I thought another murder was going to take place. It was rumoured that the iron discipline imposed on the regiment had a lot to do with the behaviour of the men.

Every morning a contingent of convicts from Parkhurst Prison passed through the camp *en route* for a

quiet railway siding where they entrained for the purpose of digging defence trenches round the coast. Among them were a number of notorious criminals who aroused curiosity, but when the rainy weather set in and the soldiers, drenched to the skin, saw the convicts pass in covered wagons, well protected by warm, rain-proof coats, there were derisive jeers from the upholders of law and order. The joke was that it was better to be a guest at Parkhurst than a goat in the army.

Morgan and I slept on the ground and fed frugally with the aid of a primus stove. Though the work was hard and exacting it was worth while to be in daily contact with the varied types of young manhood on which militarism had not yet set its despoiling mark. Old Contemptibles, who had temporarily returned from the trenches through wounds or illness told harrowing tales of what was happening at the front, which gave an impetus to patriotic fervour and the demand for more recruits. I appealed to local civilians in the form of a poem that appeared in the Isle's newspaper.

How easy it was in those days to point the path of duty to the other man! That I could write inducements and yet not enrol myself in the valiant host may seem hypocritical, but actually it was not. I knew I should join up some time, but the immediate importance of the work I was doing, and the knowledge that I was making no financial profit out of the delay, enabled me to carry on without any qualms of conscience. Before the autumn was out I had made hosts of friends from those Midland regiments, and when the time came for them to go abroad I joined the marchers at the station and shared the last farewells of wives, sweethearts, and little children. So severe had been the barrack discipline that many of the men were obviously glad to get away, and when I asked an old 'sweat' why the C.O. was not in attendance he replied that 'the b—— was afraid he'd get shot.'

From the Isle of Wight I was transferred to the bleak

downs of Morn Hill, near Winchester, where, under canvas and the most wretched conditions, the troops spent the Christmas of 1914. Here the few Y.M.C.A. helpers had a gargantuan task in meeting the needs of the men and none of us was sorry when the gales and torrential rains reduced the camp to a quagmire and compelled the authorities to put every one in proper billets. My new destination was the Hilsea Barracks at Portsmouth.

It was rumoured that these barracks had been condemned long before the War, and from their dirty, dismal, and damp atmosphere, I could well believe it. The place was overcrowded with recruits from provincial homes and I arrived to find them queuing up in the rain for a small ration of anaemic stew. Happily, the Y.M.C.A. had been given a large hall that could be used as a refuge, and the men took full advantage of the comforts we had to offer. The evening sing-song was a robust affair and the talent we discovered among the audience would have done credit to the professional stage. Sunday was observed with reverence and thanksgiving, and I conducted services attended by large numbers of men. Then one day Mr Heald of the Y.M.C.A. Headquarters came along and swept me off to the Remount Depot at Swaythling, near Southampton, where a new Y.M.C.A. hut was about to be opened. Here I joined a Mr Cory and between us we tried to give the men a happy time. Cory, however, who had been used to the purity of pastoral life, found a difficulty in accommodating himself to the atmosphere of a crowded room, for he imagined he was being attacked by millions of unhealthy germs that would strike him down with dreadful disease. Of course he retained splendid health. Indeed, in the pleasant surroundings of that attractive village the most overburdened hearts could not fail to find relief through the beauties of nature.

But the overburdened hearts were certainly not of the officers of the camp, for they commandeered a large



*'Armed' Workers of the Y.M.C.A., Morn Hill,  
Winchester, 1914*

I AM SHOULDERING THE SQUEEGEE





field for horse polo and thought more about chasing the ball at home than the enemy abroad. It looked as if the jolly old War was nothing to be feared on that sporting field and though an endless procession of guns and men passed down the railway line within view of the players, the only grim struggle that seemed to be worth bothering about was the one taking place between the goal-posts. The non-commissioned ranks seemed always at work.

As the call for recruits became more insistent I decided to relinquish the Y.M.C.A. work and join up with the rank and file for active service abroad. I already felt myself to be an integral part of the army, having shared the early privations of the troops and the close comradeship of hundreds of men in the various camps in which I had worked. So I travelled up to London with my heart firmly set and enlisted as a private in the Field Ambulance Corps at the Duke of York's School, Chelsea. My aversion to killing, illogical as it may seem, remained intact.

It was something of a relief to be dressed in khaki, for it gave young men the right to hold the head high and to be exempt from the white feathers of fatuous women. My first business after attestation was to fill a kit-bag with army 'clobber' and to go along with Bert Jenkins to what turned out to be a bug-infested billet in a dirty little street at the back of King's Road. After the first exciting night we protested against this accommodation and were instantly given more salubrious quarters at a house in Trafalgar Square. The little buxom landlady had managed to squeeze nearly a dozen recruits into her small rooms, and besides rationing them out with the plainest of food she made no protest against an accordion and mouth-organs vigorously exercised by some of her guests while neighbours were asleep. She knew that in the payment of bills the army never defaulted.

The parade-ground at the Duke of York's was the scene of much activity during those sunny spring days

of 1915. Instructors' voices sounded above the roar of passing traffic and the approving faces of the public were turned to gaze on the squads of men earnestly drilling. I was attached to a platoon presided over by a boozy, breezy sergeant (nicknamed 'Uncle') who had descended from the stage. He had a vulgar, raucous tongue and probably found his present position more tenable than that behind the footlights. At any rate he had the masterly art of knocking out of raw recruits whatever decent elements of manhood stood in the way of military efficiency. Most of us, no doubt, were quite prepared to have our civilian heads knocked off, provided the execution was tolerably graceful. But 'Uncle' soon taught us the essential brutality of militarism. It takes hold of the young combatant by the scruff of the neck, wrings all the finer qualities and sensibilities out of him, and then pours in the blood-lust and the mechanical desire to kill. 'Uncle' crushed us with the power of his tongue. By ridicule and insult he struck at the most vulnerable part of a man's nature until embarrassment gave way to anger and anger subsided into quiescence. One day he overstepped the mark. In rounding on a young recruit for a slight mishap in drill, he added: 'An' tell yer mother not to drop another one as silly as you,' at which the angered young man stepped out of the ranks and threatened to knock the sergeant down if he dared to make another reference to his mother. 'Uncle' was more circumspect after that. Personally I had seen too much of this sort of bullying in the camps to be either surprised or horrified. To accept the humiliations with calm was much better than futilely breaking one's head against the brick wall of army discipline.

I enjoyed those early training days in the heart of London. Behind drum and fife we sang our way through the streets and, tingling with the glow of radiant health, expanded under the smiles of the admiring girls.

In Battersea Park we dashed about with stretchers and bandaged the imaginary wounded before the eyes of wondering children. Then Bert and I, scintillating from boots to brow, swaggered off to the West End with little canes and carried out voluntary parades round the bandstand in Hyde Park before going to a theatre or to a concert at the Y.M.C.A. As the Zeppelins had not yet disturbed the peace of London, the heavens could still declare their loveliness without causing panic. The jazz band was becoming popular.

Before the spring was out I was sent to join the 2/5th London Field Ambulance Corps, which was in training at Hatfield Broad Oaks. The camp was situated in the beautiful park of Barrington Hall, and everything to please the eye and strengthen the body was here in abundance. Birds sounded the reveille, and after physical jerks in the scented air we breakfasted heartily on porridge and real strawberry jam, and then marched the Essex lanes behind a band that 'waked to ecstasy' the charming little villages through which we passed. And how pensively the cows stood and stared as our united voices salvoed out the songs, *Pack up your troubles in your old kit-bag*, *Keep the home fires burning*, *There's a long, long trail a-winding*, and other popular tunes to which we set our own appropriate lyrics. Those summer days were enjoyable and it was good to see the bronzed faces and the high degree of fitness of young men who normally spent their lives in the stifling offices and factories of London.

Our C.O., Major Corfe, was a middle-aged doctor who accepted military responsibilities with the gravity of the operating-room. Like many other medical men he probably hated army discipline and often allowed his temper to explode by stamping his feet and delivering crimson language at the least provocation. But no man went to him in trouble without receiving kindness and

consideration. He had a warm disposition and his unorthodox order, 'Fall in, men,' was a friendly gesture we all appreciated. I believe the war would never have started if the decision had been left to Major Corfe.

Of different character was Major Macauley, a down-right elderly Scot who dispensed humour and rough justice with equal candour. To the lads of C Section, which he commanded, he was Father-in-Chief, from whom they received the flattering opinion that so far as efficiency was concerned they had no superiors in the British Army. The blood of Bannockburn still flowed on. . . .

Next in importance was Captain Steadman, of Harley Street, who was a strange compound of brilliant earnestness and reckless irresponsibility. At one hour he was the medical scientist of the lecture-room, seriously instructing us in the use of anti-toxins and fracture-splints, the next he was the dashing cavalier in adventurous mood, which ended in his giggling like a thrilled schoolboy over some trifling incident. A stickler for army rules, he was unpleasantly ruthless in their application, for no man better enjoyed playing at soldiers than he. I remember him on night manoeuvres, charging up the Essex lanes on a high-spirited horse breathlessly shouting orders and converting the scene into something approaching Wild West drama. 'On, on, you noblest English'—but Sir Galahad had not yet ventured outside the safety zone.

Then there was Sergeant-Major Baum, a veteran tobacconist of Croydon, who certainly should have been back at his counter selling cigars, instead of spoiling his lungs on the parade ground. Attached to his ruddy countenance was a thick, curled moustache, that helped to give his short, podgy figure a Velasquian appearance as he sat dignified and stately on his equally podgy horse. But as his equestrian abilities were doubtful, his dignity soon vanished under the embarrassment of being bounced along, when his phraseology, if not his body, often fell from grace.





*Miss Laurence and the Seven Companions*  
 I AM SEATED ON THE CHAIR AT THE LEFT



*Jack Harvey (standing) and I in the Mud on Salisbury  
 Plain, 1916*

'Private Thompson, what's your name?' was a typical inquiry when he wished to blacklist a delinquent for pack-drill.

'Williams, screw your chin-strap straight,' an order that caused all chin-straps to be screwed out of the straight.

On route marches someone would shy a pebble at his horse, which not only forced him into acrobatics to keep his seat but also into a snorting demand for the offender to declare himself. The response came in a general rendering of:

We are but Territorials,  
Who only earn a bob a day;  
The more we do the more we may,  
It makes no difference to our pay,

which was adapted to the tune of a well-known hymn. On other occasions he was nearly shaken into eternity by the devilment of Corporal Bender, the strapping big-drummer of the band, who suddenly gave the signal for action by two resounding bangs just as the S.M. and his steed were sauntering by. But happily, the rider generally managed to keep his position and the affection of his 'family of boys.'

We continued under canvas until the autumn rains, when conditions became so wretched that much illness resulted from having to sleep on the sodden ground. Youths not yet inured to the hardships of training sat crying through the night with misery, and a mighty cheer went up when the order came to strike camp, and we marched off to billets in the quiet Essex village of Newport.

In a moderately sized house beyond the church lived the Misses Laurence in simple retirement, and the village received a shock when it became known that these two maiden sisters had taken in seven soldiers to eat, sleep, and be merry under their roof. Gadzooks and shuttle-cocks! Did Lord Kitchener know? Tell it not in



Gath but in the holes and corners of village gossip. The local church folk looked askance at their two tottering pillars, and in many a home the talk of war for a time was eclipsed. But we who had the good fortune to be billeted on these sisters (as one was a partial invalid, reference to Miss Laurence, our hostess, will suffice for the two) soon realized that a shaft from heaven had come to lighten our darkness and to stamp our lives with the heroism of true Christian service. With a broad-mindedness rare in village life, she ministered to all our comforts and encouraged a social spirit worthy of the happiest family. Hot baths awaited our incoming from the snow, and while drenched clothes were hung round the fire, she attended to others that wanted repairs or prepared a wholesome meal that improved our strength and spirits enormously. Then she trooped us off to neighbouring farms to meet the galaxy of girls duly assembled and to spend the evening in song and dance, till an ample supper made us merrier still. Then we used our dramatic talents to play the ghost scene from *Hamlet* on the stairs, where in the dim reflection of a candlelight 'walked the bed-sheet,' while I, engirdled by an ancestral sword, put terror in the hearts of the crouching audience by plunging it into the ceiling to enforce the final oath.

'I have sworn it!' Crash.

'You mean, torn it!' quietly corrected Miss Laurence.

But it would require a chapter to record the life and times of that happy household. The influence of that good woman was profound, and she was fully repaid by the unfailing courtesy and respect she received from us all. Fortunately the Seven Good Companions had been drawn together by the ties of taste and character, and the comradeship formed at that time was destined to endure throughout the war.

Swann, Fulcher, Thompson, and Dicker all came from the Port of London Authority. Gentry had left the silks and satins behind an Oxford Street counter,

while King, an ardent Roman Catholic, had travelled the road as a salesman, like myself. And what splendid characters they were. The local Methodist chapels often claimed Swann to preach the Sunday sermons, while Fulcher, the blue-eyed Adonis of the corps, exchanged reverential glances with Farmer Hare's adoring daughters. On Thompson fell the avalanche of weekly parcels laden with good things for the table, which had a mental counterpart in the fund of humour provided by Tommy Dicker. In fact, all of us had some contribution to make towards the happiness of the home; but the name of Miss Laurence needs to be written in gold.

Those Elysian days came to an end early in 1916, when the 60th London Division, to which our corps was attached, removed to Salisbury Plain for active service training. The whole village turned out to bid us farewell, and there was much tearful laughter and gaiety before we marched off into the night. To Miss Laurence and her sister it was a poignant farewell and we who had enjoyed their generous hospitality felt the sadness of parting as deeply as they. These women were among those real Angels of War, who shone through the minds of men as the 'vision splendid' long after they had passed from sight.

In the encampment on Salisbury Plain the training became more severe. The Seven Companions still clung together in the same hut and were joined by young Jack Harvey (son of Sir John Martin Harvey), who was then barely sixteen years of age. His parents wanted him to go in for a commission, but as Jack insisted on becoming Private Harvey, we enjoyed the benefit of his artistic temperament by having the hut decorated by wonderful pen-pictures which he could sketch in a few seconds. New creations for feminine attire came to him as if by inspiration, and the fashion-plates he set

before us would have roused the envy of many a West End dress designer. He also shared the mantle of acting with his illustrious parents, and could portray feminine characters with extraordinary ability.

The British Army is notoriously jealous of caste distinction, and frames its discipline with as much intention to protect the buncombe of rank as to preserve order on the battle-field. This explains why we spent many dreary hours learning to salute with mathematical precision and why the correct position of the chin-strap attained immense importance. As only the officers were supposed to have intelligence, our approach to military efficiency was by way of senseless inflictions that sought to make us mechanical robots with no capacity for individual thought and initiative. If we indicated the possession of any such initiative, every effort was made to crush it by pettifogging rules and mental and physical torment. Napoleon, it is said, looked upon the rank and file as sub-human idiots, and if the institution of the pack had any relevance to that idea, then military tradition has kept up its end very well. For no infliction filled me with greater rage than that of carrying that heavy burden on my back, unfitted to my small stature and demanding the same output of physical strength as a man with twice my width of shoulders. Well do I remember those long, agonizing route marches over the Plain when I staggered along under a monstrous load, with the shoulder-straps cutting into my flesh, and the crown of my head feeling as if a hundred little devils were tugging at the strings. Under the stress of physical exhaustion I kicked the heels in front of me, swayed from side to side and threatened to collapse at any moment. All I could see was a phantom movement of khaki shapes, condemned to struggle on and on until the whistle for the ten minutes' rest brought a halt, when I threw myself down in a heap and allowed the consciousness of field and sky to flow normally back to life. This was the type of training that was to im-

prove physical fitness and increase natural powers of endurance. That strapping officers sat on the backs of horses all the way, and were not called upon to carry a bigger satchel than would hold a flask of whisky, seemed to suggest that energy was mystically incorporated with the status of rank. 'What about the bloody whistle,' was often shouted at the C.O. when he kept us going beyond the regulation hour and showed not the slightest concern about our exhausted condition. And how annoying it was to see the officers jump off their horses to stretch their limbs and to revel in the freedom of the march, while we, the exhausted ones, lay as if our bodies had been battered, and feeling ready to expire on the spot. Yes, the pack was the curse of my army days, and the authorities are wise in not showing in recruiting posters a picture of men coming in from a long route march in full pack.

Occasional week-end passes to London gave a relief from the mud and misery of those wintry days. During my first visit I made the acquaintance of a girl-student of Polish extraction, at a literary institute. Marian, like myself, was poetically inclined, had great ideals, and a decided tendency towards revolutionary Socialism. For hours we sat in the corners of tea-shops and effused over each other's compositions before exchanging lofty thoughts that would indeed have turned our silly old world into Arcady, could they have been given half a chance. The War I defended as a regrettable means to a noble end, but Marian was too distrustful of parsons and politicians to accept this view. Take the profit out of war and what enthusiasm would be left for the stay-at-homes to carry on the slaughter?

To her advanced, and what proved to be correct way of thinking, the idealism of the Allied cause was a deliberate sham—a cotton-wool coating of the sword by unscrupulous financiers, international munition-mongers, jingoist press lords, and by the unholy tribe of reactionary leaders of Church and Parliament, who

set up a fictitious image of the Holy Grail to lure the eyes of youth to the fields of death and destruction. As I was keen to go abroad, and half fearful of the war ending before my dream was consummated, I was not to be tempted by Marian's opinions, though I knew that to believe otherwise was a form of pleasant self-deception. And so she proceeded to attack my illusions by sending me copies of the most anti-war periodicals as soon as I got back to camp. Every fortnight I received a bundle of literature, which included the *Workers' Dreadnought*, the *Cambridge Magazine*, *Freedom*, the *Clarion*, and Communist pamphlets all wrapped up in the innocent-looking *Christian Commonwealth*. What General Bulfin would have said had he seen these literary bombshells spread about the hut defies speculation, but the enlightenment that I and other readers derived from this source was a fitting prelude to the disillusionment that was shortly to overtake us.

Marian was the only companion I had at that time in London, and though our friendship was purely platonic, it was only my impeccable regard for pure manhood that prevented a more intimate understanding. Having bridged the loneliness from which both of us suffered, it was only natural that her desire for sexual expression should reveal itself during my final leave, when perhaps to her imagination I might be swallowed up in the jaws of death and pass out of her life for ever. But feeling far too 'noble' to respond, I left her with our friendship as 'unsullied as the skies,' while I, poor victim of exaggerated idealism, was to reap the sad harvest of unnatural sex-repression in later years. Marian is now a memory, but so are golden sunsets, the first flowers of spring, a comrade's voice in the night, and many other things that have helped to sweeten life.

## FRANCE

The 60th London Division embarked for France towards the end of June 1916. We had travelled from Warminster in a state of high excitement at the prospect of crossing the Channel, and a crowd of relatives had gathered at Southampton to see many of the lads off. At last the day had come. If the *Connaught* were just about to take us on a pleasure-trip round the world, there could not have been more smiling faces crowding on her decks than there were on that sunny afternoon. Like children of the 'Dreamship,' we cheered the little pleasure steamers coming up the Solent, as if to show universal thanks for the privilege of sailing to the 'fairytale grotto of Flanders' before it had all closed up. I remember glancing at the bronzed-faced infantryman of Camden Town and the city offices of London, and wondering how many were smiling in an English sunset for the last time.

The boat moved away in the stillness of the night like a mother tip-toeing from a sleeping child. Huddled together on deck, sleep came easily to those whose imagination was not troubled by peaceful stars and the shadowy forms of docks and downland that receded slowly in the distance. Those of us who lay awake held silent communion with our thoughts and suffered the physical discomfort of crushed-up limbs without a grouse. As 'dreams of home' were not for me, my thoughts centred on the copy of Palgrave's *Golden Treasury* lying at the bottom of the pack under my head and I wondered if the optimism of bringing such a volume out with me would be justified. Suppose it were confiscated and this close friend—then I glanced at the placid face of Lance-Corporal Harry, and remembered what a fine comrade he was. Some characters have the sparkle of nickel-plate, but are rather disappointing

when you probe beneath the surface; the character of Harry had the richness of sterling gold which every one appraised at its true value. It was a comforting feeling to have him at my side.

We arrived at Le Havre the next morning in drizzling rain and to a babble of French tongues on the quay-side. Laden with heavy kit we lined up in the dockyard and waited. The rain came down in torrents, so we sat on our packs to keep the water out. Every one looked miserable. 'Come on, get a bloody move on,' shouted voices up and down the line, but as the C.O. was not about to receive the invitation, there was no option but to carry on waiting and forget about the urgent need of our presence in the trenches. Fortunately there was enough industry going on around to keep us interested. Long processions of motor lorries squelched through the mud and returned from depots loaded with provisions and war material of every description. French soldiers whose pale, scared faces bore the stamp of their experiences, pushed barrows about the yard and seemed oblivious of our or even of their own existence. Mountains of treacherous-looking barbed wire stood in front of us, while at the rear twanged a score of telephone-wires without cessation. Then came parties of infantrymen caked with the mud of the trenches, and with glassy eyes turned towards home, forcing a smile from under dripping helmets.

'Ave yer coom for a bath?' remarked one cheerful lad as he passed with a sodden ground-sheet over his head.

'No, mate, to staff the water-works,' came the quick reply of Ted Knight, who was renowned for his Cockney humour.

Then came two buxom Frenchwomen selling hot rolls. Not having solved all the problems of money values a noisy process of bartering sets in, which is further complicated by the want of language to allay suspicion of mutual robbery. 'Come on, Rene, you can settle this,'

and while the vendors wildly gabble and gesticulate, the little Anglo-French tailor of the corps pushes his way in and rattles off a torrent of French, as if giving an ominous warning of attack. We are surprised to find, however, that he is really carrying out peaceful negotiations, and the interviews end to every one's satisfaction. The C.O. returns while we sit munching the delicious rolls and responding to the order, 'Fall in, men,' we form up in line of column and plonk along through the mud to spend the night under canvas a few miles outside the town.

The next morning we marched to the railway station without a sign of interest from the French people that thronged the streets. The bright sunshine gave a tonic to our spirits, but all our whistling and singing could not penetrate the stolid indifference of the passers-by. Of course, eighteen months of war was nothing to sing about, but these French realists obviously dealt leniently with our cheerful behaviour, well knowing that it would soon be shattered by experience. We lined up on the platform before a long row of stinking cattle-trucks. Horse-dung was being swept from some of them while an officer was chalking up '40 Hommes' on each one to denote the extent of the fresh consignment. The officers had a comfortable carriage reserved to themselves.

With forty men, complete with kit, packed into each truck there was precious little room for the spreading of limbs and the preservation of good temper. As the sliding door had to be open a little for the admission of fresh air, I had the uncomfortable experience of lying against this aperture with my head exposed to the winds and rain of the journey. 'Dog biscuits' and 'posse' (jam), washed down by oily tea made with engine-water, served as a meal, and we moved off in the stillness of the night with our recumbent bodies packed like sardines and heads resting on pillows made up of boots wrapped up in tunics. The first catastrophe was the falling of heavy kit which dangled precariously from nails above



our heads. 'What the hell——! and as fellows stood up and fumbled in the dark to string it up again the trucks would suddenly shunt back on one another and bring a lump of humanity crashing down on to our legs, to the accompaniment of much swearing. In fact, the train jogged along like a bronchial old man who had to stop every few yards to get his breath, which gave our ribs such a succession of shocks and shakings that sleep was impossible. I longed for 'The roseate hues of early dawn,' and lost no time in sliding back the door to bring in the morning sun and the keen air of the countryside. Then we dangled our feet over the side of the trucks and shouted to the peasants working in the fields. Later on the little French children crowded near the line and scrambled for the 'Bullee bif,' 'Bisque,' and discarded tins of 'Bon jamb' thrown to them by generous allies. At the first halt we plunged our heads into the station fire-buckets and under the pump that filled the engines. Then we rush out to the nearest hucksters to denude the place of rolls and butter by which to humanize our stomachs and to derive a grim satisfaction in shying the atrocious army biscuits at targets of equal hardness. Continuing the journey at a snail's pace we eventually arrive at the beautiful country around Abbeville, after which a sudden acceleration takes place as if the train is hurrying us on for the next battle. Since leaving Le Havre there had been little sign of the war, but now vast aerodromes come into view and roads packed with lorries and marching French soldiers make us sit up and take notice. Someone starts to sing: *Pack up your troubles in your old kit-bag*, which the whole train-load soon takes up with tremendous gusto while a number of British Tommies, standing outside a depot, glance round with a pained expression and as if they are saying: 'You bloody fools, going up cheerful,' which of course, makes not the slightest difference to our emotional outburst. The next moment we are passed by truck-loads of soldiers travelling in a home-

ward direction and caked with the mud of the trenches. They are almost hysterical with delight and strain weary-looking, bloodless faces to send us on with a cheer. Their eyes were like those of a scared dog under the raised arm of a brutal master.

We disentrained at St.-Pol and were glad to greet the open sky after that tedious journey. A Sabbath calm rested over the village and girls in brightly coloured dresses waved from cottage doorsteps as we marched away. How many processions of bright-eyed British lads had already smiled back at 'home and beauty' when leaving that little village I cannot say, but a woman who sat knitting at the entrance to an estaminet like a Madame Lefarge seemed to betray some dark secret in her immovable face.

For a moment I was back again in the Essex lanes under a cloudless sky and among the scent and beauty of the open countryside. In the ripening corn and bountiful orchards Mother Nature smiled eternal fulfilment in the sustaining power of life, whereas a few miles away men were smashing one another to bits in accord with their higher intelligence. A neglected ploughshare on the crest of a field was a fitting monument to human fatuity. The guns, the guns—yes, we could now hear the low, continuous roaring of the guns. No, it was not a peaceful sunset consecrating the joys and affections of simple country life but the red anger of exploding shells and shrapnel shattering the earth and air round the basin of the Somme. Our whistling and singing stopped. All eyes were fixed on that crimson sky, and when Swann remarked in apprehensive tones: 'That's it, boys, we're in for it now,' he aptly expressed the feelings of the corps. And the more we advanced the more insistent grew the rumblings and the flaming upsurge of the sky, In silence we staggered along under the tortuous pack, hungry and fatigued, and

wondering whether we should soon be taking up position in the trenches. Then the homely lights of an estaminet came in view, and there was the portly proprietor standing in the doorway and enjoying a pipe with the utmost *sang-froid*.

'Donny wa buckshee booze, mister?' shouts Ted Knight, on behalf of his throat.

'La, la, booze fini,' returns the proprietor with a gesture of assuring finality. Probably he then went in and told his wife how he had stopped a mutiny.

Eventually we halted near a sleeping village and took possession of whatever barns, cowsheds, and shelters were available. A number of us managed to squeeze together in a cosy hay-loft, where we awakened after a few hours' sleep to madame's dear old face inviting us to cups of delicious coffee which she had brought in on a tray. Smilingly, she understood our profuse thanks for this kindly early morning grace and as she went out to render further hospitality to the visitors on her estate, I thought of the ravages of war bearing down on such considerate old people, who certainly cherished no malice towards any one. Within sound of the guns they continued to farm the land with extraordinary courage, while the honours of bravery were reserved for the battle-field. Perhaps the only recognition they needed was to be left alone to live and work in peace.

The opening of the Somme offensive gave us a drastic introduction to the realities of modern warfare. For three days and nights the ceaseless groaning of the guns sounded like the mighty roaring of a giant spreading havoc and destruction over the earth. After two days' heavy marching we arrived at the crest of a hill and saw the shattering explosions of the shells as they rained over the German lines. How men could possibly live in such an inferno was beyond imagination, for the whole sector was being battered to a pulp. Yet, as they were not our trenches, the horror was almost fascinating. Not able to conceal his elation, one of the officers was

overjoyed that 'Jerry was getting it in the neck,' which opinion was easily acquired by any one still standing in the safety zone. Most of us were content to watch with more humble reflections.

Fortunately the division was spared the slaughter of the Somme and was taken a little further north to take over the sector of the line called the Labyrinth. This was an amazing network of trenches constructed by a French division, and took the shape of a horseshoe, flanked by the famous Vimy Ridge. To the 2/5th L.F.A. was given the task of running a field hospital near the village of Hautes Avesnes. This comprised a number of fitted-up huts a little distance behind the lines, and served as a kind of clearing-station for minor casualties and men suffering from the common ailments of the trenches. The hospital was full of patients at the outset.

Strolling down a lane I came across a number of French women draped in black, kneeling reverentially before a wayside crucifix. It seemed ironic that an image of the Prince of Peace should be standing so near the scene of slaughter. In the distance could be seen the battered town of Arras, with the ruined cathedral looking like a white sepulchre in a deserted world. Nature alone refused to be obliterated, for flaming poppies and fields of corn still flourished in the sun and called for the defiant hands of peasants to accept the bounty. Many of these hands were still active, for the old and the young showed an unyielding spirit to the encroaching dangers around. They were like trustful children playing at the foot of a volcano.

The immediate enemy we had to fight was the ailment called P.U.O. (Pyrexia under Observation—a phrase, it was said, that covered up the medical ignorance of the precise cause and cure), and we soon became extremely busy in restoring patients to health. In the surgical hut I spent many a day squeezing out boils and sores and in holding down patients when a painful lancing process was necessary. Some of the doctors seemed callous in the

use of the knife, but if Ted Knight was about, he generally cheered the atmosphere by asking if there were 'any more buttons to be pressed,' or 'troubles with your old —— bag,' or by unmentionable expressions that were as good as a local anaesthetic. A more revolting spectacle, however, was provided by a brigade dentist, a fat, pompous, ruthless individual, who extracted teeth as he would rusty nails from a fence. All he required was a chair and a pair of forceps, and as each jaw showed a reason for bringing them into use, one hand would press back the man's face while his other wrenched out the offending tooth with brutal energy. To middle-aged men especially, this was a torturous process, and when in after years I met the same dentist operating in a civilian capacity, I could not avoid complimenting him on the progress he had made.

Another enemy we had to battle against was vermin—no, not the few marauding bandits that attack every soldier, but whole battalions of fat, juicy lice that swarmed over shirts and uniforms and literally made them move as they lay heaped in the sun. As fumigation was hopeless, I was given the job of spreading out the clothes on a table and with a hot iron crushing to extinction the mass of lice and eggs that crawled about and filled the seams. To keep my eyes fixed on the squelching bodies made me feel sick, and I had to leave the horror at intervals to revive in the fresh air. I began to feel that the pests were crawling about in my brain. The clothes had come from the backs of men who had been in the trenches for weeks without a change. War also had to be declared against a plague of rats which embedded themselves under the huts and multiplied much faster than they could be exterminated. In the dead of night they stalked the wards and ransacked the pockets of the patient's tunics hanging on the walls. Then they fought to rob one another of the proceeds and carried on noisy skirmishes over the beds until they were chased away. The audacity of the creatures was

simply amazing. Often when sitting quietly alone by the light of a candle a few burly specimens would stealthily creep past my feet, jump on to the table and push on to the floor potatoes and chunks of bread and cheese, which they manœuvred along until they all disappeared down the holes. A villager who put a large trap under one of the huts found it filled to bursting-point the next morning, and gave his terrier dog a busy time in shaking the rodents to death as they gradually pushed one another out into the open. The last survivor was not allowed to emerge, as he would probably have attacked the dog.

It was at this hospital that I experienced my first real disgust at the disparity of treatment between officers and men. If historians choose to ignore this scandal of army administration, it is because they either wish to uphold the caste system or else to draw a veil over methods that make us the laughing-stock of colonial troops. In the formation of civilian armies during the war, one could understand the maintenance of a reasonable distinction in the interests of discipline, but to impose the full amount of official class snobbery on a rank and file that contained in a large degree men of higher social and intelligent standing than the officers in authority over them was a galling thing for volunteer soldiers to endure. It was not a question of the maintenance of authority but of privileges and pamperings, which every officer enjoyed, or could enjoy, in accordance with army rule. Belgravia lorded it over Bermondsey. A pip and a Sam Browne belt were sufficient to exempt the owner from cleaning a single button or from performing any personal service save that of going to the lavatory. An orderly followed him about like Mary's little lamb, and if he had a horse a groom looked after it in addition. And what officer cared to go without his course dinners and whisky and comfortable bed when circumstances

permitted? Objectionable enough under ordinary conditions, this extravagant sort of preferential treatment was nauseating when it was transferred to the care of the wounded and the sick in hospitals. In the officers' ward, where I was on duty as an orderly for a time, the patients were pampered like helpless old ladies fastidiously recuperating in a Bournemouth nursing-home. Though only a few miles behind the front line, they were put to bed for the slenderest of reasons and enjoyed the comfort and the attention which ought to have been given to more serious cases among the rank and file. Not to offend their delicate stomachs, the bread and butter was cut to a special thinness and served on a plate to a special design. And included in the six-course dinner every night was generally the chicken and delicacies which should have been prescribed to meet the urgent needs of Private Tommy Atkins lying seriously ill in the next ward. Little wonder that the place became a 'miking centre' for officers in need of a rest, while the other part of the hospital often became so overcrowded that patients had to lie out in the open on stretchers and put up with standardized food and attention. To suggest malingering among the officers, of course, was unthinkable, but I once saw a frail little man of over fifty suspected of the offence in another ward and forced from his bed by an armed guard that literally carried him away before the triumphant gaze of the medical officer in charge.

Soon after the Somme offensive a number of us were sent to the trenches to gain further experience in the line. Not having received our baptism of fire, this first visit was a breaking-in process to both nerve and spirit, which we approached with no little apprehension. It was a hot, sunny afternoon when the guide led us into the war zone, where an uncanny silence rested over the deserted fields and the battered towers of Marœuil stood defiantly before the enemy's guns. In single file we picked our way between monstrous shell-holes and rusty impedimenta of former battles, half hidden under a mantle of poppies

and neglected corn. The song theme of the birds was desolation. Halting at the village of Anzin, we saw the steeple of the old church with its side ripped away and the bells hanging for any one to ring. Not a single house stood intact, and among the ruins were sewing-machines, pictures, broken dolls, and domestic articles, that showed only too well how simple peasant homes had been hurriedly deserted before being smashed to atoms by the guns. And to add poignancy to the scene, a French soldier and his wife were mournfully searching among the debris of what had obviously been their little cottage.

The reserve dressing station was an old dug-out situated at the junction of the Lille-Baupaume road. We arrived to find Corporal Quigley driving off the rats from patients who lay on tiers of stretchers, awaiting evacuation. So numerous were the pests in this area that they crowded the dug-out steps and raided the food with alarming persistency.

'Come on, Quig, a drop of that spare rum, and to hell with the rats.'

'I don't know whether we're fighting the Boche or these b——s,' replied Quig, putting down his instrument of torture. 'You can have all the rum if you will act the Pied Piper to this tribe.'

Heavy fighting had taken place over this ground and all the trees were blasted of leaf and bough. One of them which overlooked the old German line was moulded in an iron foundry and was such a splendid replica that one had to feel it to discover the deception. It had been used as a sniper's nest, when observation could be made from a little shuttered aperture near the top of the trunk. A few yards from the dug-out were the remains of a wayside inn, in the open cellar of which lay a heap of human bones mixed up with fragments of French and German uniforms. On the surface of the ground bodies stuck out from the thin layer of soil that had been hastily thrown over them, and little improvised wooden



crosses, bearing French inscriptions written in pencil, recorded in a pathetic manner who were lying in this simple cemetery. In the distance stretched the Vimy Ridge, looking like a vast rabbit warren with piles of earth bleaching in the sun. One of the first tasks of the division was to mine this ridge on a grand scale, and the spectacle of 'Vimy going up' was eagerly anticipated for months to come. The German occupants, however, were left undisturbed until the Canadians set the fuse at a later date. It resulted in one of the most annihilating explosions of the war.

The next day we crossed the Lille road with heads well down and entered the communication trench that led to the advanced dressing station and the front line. A profusion of poppies and wild flowers lined the parapet but gradually diminished as we approached the more blasted interior of the Labyrinth. At one point the diggers had cut right through the body of a German soldier, for fragments of bones and clothing stuck out on each side of the trench. No one had been moved to lay a finger on them. Our concern was to keep up with the guide and to make mental notes of the direction he took. Was he mistaking the way and leading us into no-man's-land? We seemed to be winding in and out for miles, turning down one road and passing the next until we came to the main arteries that bore such names as Piccadilly, Haymarket, and the Strand. Suddenly Fulcher and I, who carried a stretcher between us, made a sprawling descent on to the duckboards as a shell came whistling through the air and exploded with shattering force a few feet from the parapet. A cascade of earth fell over us and I had a frightful feeling that I had been hit. The only cool man was the guide, who stood grinning at us like a disembodied spirit.

'If yer carry on like that yer won't want any Epsom salts,' he drily commented.

But our initiation had only just started. Whiz-bangs came over like snarling devils intent on frightening the

life out of us, and as they burst into a hundred fiery fragments I realized for the first time the impotency of human flesh caught up in this mechanical onslaught. Walking behind Fulcher I glanced at the outline of his smooth, plump face and pictured a lump of hot shell smashing into it and destroying the wonderful system of bone and blood that nature had been building up since he was a tiny speck. It also might happen to me, and as I reflected a cold terror surged over my body and put me into a sweat, I was passing through the first nervous shock, and found relief as soon as I said to myself: 'I don't care a damn what happens. If I'm blown to hell, well, what odds; I can only die once. I'm at the mercy of fate.'

One had to become a fatalist to preserve mental balance.

It was a comfortable feeling to arrive at the first colony of dug-outs and to find such names as The Ritz, The Carlton, Cosy Corner, and Nobby's Nook decorating the entrance of subterranean homes. Men darted in and out like rabbits from a hole, and looked by their pallid faces as if they had been deprived of much sleep and sun. Nothing seemed to disturb the mechanical way with which they moved about. Strange faces, exploding shells, and the wounded coming in on stretchers were all a normal part of trench life to be accepted with as fatalistic regard as were the rats and the lice. The 'sanfarian' spirit was the best armour against panic and the frights of the imagination.

The advanced dressing station was just in rear of the front line trenches, and as the wounded were brought in for treatment we then carried them on stretchers through the depth of the Labyrinth to the collecting post from whence they were taken to the base. Manipulating the stretcher through the narrow, tortuous trenches was a most difficult and exhausting job, for in parts the patient had to be carried shoulder-high and with as little jolting as possible during the three hours'

journey. Fortunately, the casualties were not very heavy and we varied the time by hunting rats and watching the mice playing about in the dug-outs. My own favourite practice was to lie in the sombre light of a candle reading the *Golden Treasury*, or else scribbling out verses of my own composition. To extol the visions of the mind in poetic praises was temporarily to forget the surrounding dirt and destruction and the devilish distortion of human faculty.

I have heard it said that the army is the permanent Borstal of the refractory sons of the wealthy, which is another way of saying that it is the centre of intellectual and cultural stagnation. To offset this atmosphere, even under the difficulties of active service, most divisions had sufficient brainy men to publish magazines which reflected the life and humour of the trenches in a creditable manner. In our own corps were men from Fleet Street who were no strangers to the job, and before the year (1916) was out appeared the first issue of *The Dandy Fifth*, a bright little magazine that recorded 'The Chronicles: Humorous and Serious, of a Field Ambulance while serving with the British Expeditionary Force.' It was dedicated to Lieut.-Colonel R. Corfe, R.A.M.C. My own contributions took the form of verses.

Unfortunately, owing to difficulties of production, the magazine survived only two issues, but they serve as good examples of the larger output of rank and file literature which portrays the life of the common soldier more effectively than official communiques and the reports of most of the war correspondents.

Twilight was a most depressing time during those autumnal days in the trenches. For now was the time for the sniper to crawl to his lair, the bombing-party to start blackening their faces, and the gunners to set the range for the fusillade of shells. And though the moon

had raised her lamp above it, it was the sickly glare of the Very lights that caught the attention most and pointed out to Death where best he could lay his hand. Then, as the mutilated bodies were brought in, and the groans of the wounded were mocked by the rattle of machine-guns and whining shells overhead, to bandage up a limb or to whisper a few comforting words to the dying gave a fresh justification for clinging on to life. At such times the spirit of comradeship was never sweeter, and to share the strong manliness of Harry or the unfailing blue-eyed friendliness of Fulcher was to ride the crest of noble sentiments.

One of the first things that struck me in the trenches was the absence of bitterness against the German soldiers. Prisoners were treated like so many pieces off the chess-board, to be put aside without malice while the contest went on—a contest that mechanized men to mutual slaughter until such time as they could all pack up and return home to normal humanity. That, in a phrase, was the feeling of the rank and file on both sides of no-man's-land.

One morning a notice was posted up to give the edifying information that Private L. had been sentenced to death and was due to be shot the following dawn. If the announcement was intended to act as a deterrent against disciplinary offences it would have done the authorities good to have overheard the comments of some of the readers. Knowing something about the inclination of the sentry to fall asleep through physical exhaustion and about the temperamental inducements of particular characters to shrink from extreme danger, many of us viewed these 'Shootings at Dawn' as barbaric in their severity. To defend them as necessary safeguards against the lives of a much larger number of men was to ignore the fact that millions of civilian soldiers, with every kind of physical and mental make-up, were facing up to the horrors and hardships with unshakable spirit, and that a comparatively few delinquents were as

much a tribute to the whole as they were an admission of failure on the part of individual exceptions that called for less form of condemnation than a bullet through the head. When the physical or mental resources of a man break down under extreme strain, no 'warnings' or 'deterrents' can prevent the crash, and for old generals, who never forfeited a night's sleep or set foot in the front line trench, to pronounce the death penalty on sensitive youths, before toddling back to safe billets and comfortable beds, was the sort of 'devotion to duty' in which they could eminently excel. The subsequent revelations of 'official delinquency,' as a result of which thousands of lives were unnecessarily lost by blundering generals whose only 'punishment' was higher honours and munificent grants, revealed at the same time the extraordinary nature of military justice.

My friend Marian continued to send the bunch of periodicals that helped to shatter my illusions about the righteousness of the War. Particularly was I impressed by the *Cambridge Magazine* and the quotations it gave from the foreign press. Accusations were met by accusations; the sorrow of British households linked up the stricken homes of France and Germany and on to those of Constantinople; all nations were being pillaged by the profiteers, and the help of Providence was claimed by all armies. Was it all a sham, a deadly pretence that hypnotized the mass mind to go on slaughtering, blindly carrying out a suicide pact? What was preventing a revulsion to the wastage of young life, to the adoption of poison gas and the bombing of open towns? In discussing the situation with Lewes, an ardent young stretcher-bearer, he argued that the national conscience demanded the continuance of the War until Right triumphed over Might, at whatever cost. That Germany also had a national conscience to indulge did not affect the issue. One side must be wrong in a conflict of this character, and if the Allies presumed they were right then we must fight on to the bitter end. I

replied that what often goes by the name of 'national conscience' is nothing more than a popular submission to the bullying of press and political propaganda, just as, the mass of gullible people will develop a conscience for a particular soap or headache-powder if its so-called virtues are sufficiently pumped into them by persistent advertising. We might be slaughtering on the strength of a lie, though the lie may have all the garnish of truth. For a lie is as much constituted by what is deliberately hidden from people as by what is told to them. If all the facts of secret diplomacy, financial intrigues, profit-mongering, and imperialistic aims were as widely known as the shibboleths used to effect recruitment, would not the national conscience have undergone a rapid change? Such discussions, however, always ended in deadlock.

After experience in the trenches I returned to headquarters to take charge of the venereal section of the hospital. The patients were isolated and stigmatized for catching the disease, and forfeited army pay while under treatment. This extra penalty seemed thoroughly unjustified, for as promiscuous intercourse was pretty rampant, it was chiefly a matter of luck whether a participant would get through unscathed. In some of the French towns the army authorities took precautionary measures by running their own brothels and by a system of inspection keeping the houses as free of disease as was possible. But as queues of men were continually lined up for these places contagion often occurred between the inspections. In some cases syphilis followed on the first sexual experience, and I remember the mental distress of one afflicted youth who was almost frantic with the thought that his respectable parents and young fiancée would get the information, and his life be blighted for ever. Another young fellow begged me to get him a pistol so that he could end his remorse as quickly as possible. It was the swift breaking-down of self-respect that caused the anguish, and the best method was

to try and restore it under the warmth of human sympathy and understanding. To treat venereal patients as criminals was psychologically unsound, and it was not until the army revised this attitude that the right mental aids towards recovery could be applied. About the moral aspects of sexual indulgence by men on active service I hope to say something later.

I believe that orthodox religion played a small part in sustaining the morale of the troops during the War. More important was the religion of an ideal—the ideal of crushing the Monster of Militarism, so that all nations could live according to their will in peace and concord and without the danger of aggression. The presence of padres in the war area was therefore something incongruous. As representing a particular established faith they supported the Allied cause with their own religious doctrines, while in reality it was a political ideal that was independent of them. The gospel of love cannot be preached through the cannon's mouth or at the point of the bayonet. The function of the Church should be to lead the nations away from war, and not to enter it as a pretext for furthering a doctrine they have failed to apply. But padres had a military as well as a religious significance. They personified the Divine element in the force of arms, and, with diminishing success, sustained the impression that to face up to withering machine-gun fire and to clouds of deadly gas was to be engaged in a holy crusade.

But this is not to charge all padres with insincerity. Many of them fervently believed in the usefulness of their work and in the demonstration they gave of practical religion. One of the best examples was Padre Reilly, to whose improvised little chapel behind the firing-line Thompson and I went one Sunday evening. With the aid of half a dozen candles, old estaminet seats, and a few pieces of carpet to add a touch of warmth to the shack,

he conducted his service with earnestness. About twenty young fellows lustily sang: *Fight the good fight*, and reverentially heard the preacher pray for their safe return, even while the lorries rumbled by and the sound of men marching away to the trenches kept up the rhythm, 'Lay hold on life, lay hold on life,' with ominous repetition. And then the good padre gave an inspiring talk on the 'Life of St Paul,' which took us to the peaceful shores of Galilee and among the simple fishermen who were commissioned to start a holy crusade without bullets and bombs. But Padre Reilly's words were only words, however much they soothed us. Outside, the bombing planes passed under the stars and the skyline was becoming more crimson with the flash of guns. Who could 'Fight the good fight' in a world gone mad?

'Reilly's a splendid man,' said Thompson, as we slommacked our way to camp.

I was thinking how many of the twenty young worshippers would have their prayers answered.

It was always interesting to get the view-point of young men who had come in from the trenches. Bradley, who had been in the thick of the fighting before he was eighteen, and was recommended for the D.C.M. for exceptional bravery, attributed his courage to a Prayer Book he carried in his pocket, which gave him a feeling of immunity from shot and shell. To Mackay the mental image of his black terrier waiting to receive him brought an emotional boon before going over the top, while Johnson was hopeful of getting a 'blighty hit' to return to his farm in Devon. Of different calibre was a young battalion sniper, who took a gangster-like pride in the 'guys' he had spotted, having kept a record of his victims by a variety of notches in his rifle. One special notch represented a German colonel he had 'bagged,' for whom he had watched and waited for over a month, and drawing over his face the black linen mask he used when searching for prey, he bragged of his



desire to get back to his 'nest' and to fulfil a long-standing ambition to pick off an enemy sniper whose position he had managed to locate just before leaving the trenches. In the opposite bed was a young musical Scotchman who was temperamentally unfit for killing, and feared that his uncontrollable 'cowardice' would certainly result in the death penalty. Though a bundle of nerves he was sent back to the trenches the following week.

As the rank and file were not supposed to think, and being among companions who persisted in the opposite view, I took steps to offset intellectual stagnation by forming a literary and debating society, which we named 'The Circle.' The object was to have discussion meetings, when circumstances permitted, among members who were off duty at the time, and to encourage our friends at home to send books among the supplies for bodily nourishment. Space does not allow for a full account of all our meetings, but for those who took part in them they were certainly among the happiest moments of overseas life. The first gathering was in Chaplain Reilly's room on 18th October 1916, when Swann opened up a discussion on 'The prospects of the ex-service man's reinstatement in industry in view of the introduction of female labour,' which gave rise to opinions that foreshadowed what actually was to take place. Looking through the minutes before me, I am back again at that miniature parliament of keen young men sitting round in tent and room, earnestly debating 'The prospects of German trade in England after the war,' 'That State aid will be given to ex-service men to go on the land,' 'Should German music be patronized in Britain?' and a talk given by Jack Harvey on 'The stage and public morality.' Occasionally we hired a room in a private house and indulged the social side of The Circle with wine, humour, and song.

Additional amusement was provided by the divisional concert party, the 'Barnstormers,' who gave perform-

ances worthy of a London theatre. For a brief moment hundreds of men could forget the fret and weariness of war at these shows, and thoughts of home echoed far and wide in the united singing of favourite choruses that appealed to the sentiments. The two female impersonators gave such a good account of themselves that many strangers fully believed they were 'dancing girls' sent over from London.

Towards the middle of October the rumour spread that the division was shortly leaving France for other fields of conquest. The origin of most rumours was the barber's tent, over which Private Fish presided, for though his visitors came out short of hair, they were compensated by richer knowledge of army movements, corps promotions, and impending leave to blighty. The arrival of the advance guard of a Canadian division confirmed the first rumour, and actual promotions fitted the second, but the announcement that only six of the rank and file (to be drawn by lot), could be allowed seven days' leave to England, reduced the extravagance of the third, and put the barber's tent in a state of ignominy for days. Young married men especially claimed a brief home journey before going further afield, as it was well-known that leave from the Eastern Front was a luxury enjoyed chiefly by the officers. But all we could do was to cheer the six 'lucky blighters' who smiled their way towards home.

We packed up on a bitterly cold day and started to trek in a southerly direction. The heavy rains had made a quagmire of the roads, and under the weight of winter equipment we became again the exhausted beasts of burden at the end of the day's march. Fortunately I was able to beguile the time in literary conversation with Ward—a well-read young student, who could as well deliver up sparkling gems of Shakespeare as throw cynical brickbats at other peoples' tastes and fancies. In poetry, however, we met on common ground, and with the mud splashing to our faces we struggled along

to the rhythm of favourite lines that came easily to the tongue:

Flowers are lovely; love is flower-like.

The moving waters at their priestlike task  
Of pure ablution round earth's human shores.

I would hate that Death bandaged my eyes.

Breathless we flung us on the windy hill.

Light o'er the Laspur hills was dawning fast.

These and many other quotations died away on the Flanders air and left a lingering gladness, like the light of the setting sun to soften our spirits' fatigue.

At Melliard the unit rested for a few days, which gave The Circle members an opportunity to celebrate at a small château in the village. All available French delicacies were requisitioned for the feast, and the largest table in the largest room was readily placed at our disposal. Juniper reigned supreme, and as the moistened tongue of Private Pilleau was best fitted to deliver the evening's oration, he was specially prepared to show particular honour to the event. As a student of the law, Pilleau was never hesitant in mounting the table to exercise his forensic skill on any problem that incited opposition, but having a decided bent for political fame his oratorical buds burst into full blossom whenever he was called upon to brief the cause of patriotism and Britain's participation in the war.

'Comrades of the Great War. We are engaged in the noblest, the sublimest, and yet the bloodiest [*loud cheers*], crusade ever undertaken by civilized man [*Voice: Where is he?*].

'The mailed fist of Militarism has been hanging like a shadow over Europe, blotting out the sunshine of peace [*Voice: Good old blotto*] and threatening to punch the nose [*loud cheers*] of any small nation that comes in its way.

'Let us all do our bit [*Voice: Dirty, dirty*] fearlessly and with the spirit of true patriotism, for as Seneca said—— [*the rest drowned in unprintable remarks*].

'The Union Jack stands for freedom [*tremendous cheers*]; shall we trail it in the mire? [*thunderous No*]. Then let us hoist [*Voice: Our slacks*] it higher and higher until all the tyrants of the earth are given [*Voice: Pack-drill*] to understand that Britons never, never [*great chorus of Never*] shall be slaves.' After tumultuous cheering the great patriot is then lifted bodily off the rostrum while someone reverses his hat as a doubtful compliment to his mental stability. Eighteen months later Pilleau dashed out of his tent under a torrid Egyptian sun in a state of dementia, and died soon after returning to England.

At Longpré we entrained for Marseilles, and after a tedious journey encamped on a hill from which we had a glorious view of the blue Mediterranean showing between the palm-trees. Here we spent a halcyon week in beautiful surroundings, walking the glades by day and sharing the social life of the cafés at night. The only sign of hostilities was when two young French cyclists came to blows as a spontaneous method of settling a slight dispute as to who had infringed the rules of the road.

Pleasant were the hours we spent strolling through fragrant gardens and burnishing our skin under clear, sunny skies. Soft ozones filled the lungs and a fresh vitality entered the blood. Wicked war, to make the hiatus so short and to set our minds again grovelling in the slush and slaughter of the battle-field. But there was the *Ivernia*, waiting to transport us to Salonika, like a ruthless parent trampling over children's dreams. So on the last day of November 1916 we crowded on deck and waved friendly farewells to France like ardent adventurers.

## SALONIKA

The first thing that opened our eyes as we hauled our kit on to the *Ivernia* was the presence of beds. For over five months we had slept on the ground or on the bare floors of estaminets, so that to be given the actual beds once used by tourists was to make a Wonderland of the deck suitable for any Alice. There was more sound sleep that first night than the majority of us had known since we crossed the Channel.

The next morning also brought fresh exultation. Crowding on top deck we found ourselves in the glorious setting of the Mediterranean, with the grey Corsican hills standing proudly against a cloudless sky. One had to glance at the two escorting destroyers to realize that we were sailing 'perilous seas forlorn,' for, whatever enemy lurked underneath the waters, only the friendly smile of Nature dominated the scene above. And true to the devil-may-care spirit of the times, we grasped the occasion to imagine ourselves on a pleasure cruise and to ignore the possibility of being blown up by a torpedo at any moment. So, baring our breasts to the breeze, we paced the deck like experienced travellers, and fulminated over every fresh scene that came into view. Sicilian mountains and the coast-line of southern Italy looked particularly beautiful under the azure skies and seemed to breathe the romance of song and poetry, which set our minds on the ghosts of Shelley and Byron wandering along the shores of the Adriatic, of Keats and Severn in that solitary death-bed scene, and of Beatrice standing with amorous eyes near the Piazza. A more alarming spectacle was a family of porpoises that came gambolling over the horizon and led us to believe that we had sighted the conning-tower of a submarine. As they passed the boat, Ted Knight solved the mystery of

their destination by declaring that they were 'trotting up to Gibraltar before the pubs closed.'

At Malta the *Ivernia* stopped for coaling, and was at once surrounded by the brightly coloured boats of marine hawkers laden with fruits and foodstuffs, which we were only too glad to buy. To reach us on deck, the vendors pushed up a net fixed to the end of a long bamboo pole and took precautions to have the money lowered first, before they elevated a single article. The oranges were particularly luscious, but as every one thought he was being swindled, a noisy confusion of tongues set in, when up rushed the police boat and put to flight the barterers and our change as well. To see this picturesque armada scurrying out to sea, however, was worth all the shillings we had lost.

We reached the dangerous waters of the Aegean with a growing uneasiness that a villainous submarine might be hiding round any of the numerous small islands between which the boats passed with amazing rapidity. A wreck that stuck up out of the water was not a welcome omen, and it was a glad moment when the white form of Salonika rose like a dream city through the evening mist. The temperature had fallen considerably and we made the landing by lighter in a drizzling rain and shivering with cold. For hours we waited on the quayside, feeling utterly miserable.

In war there seems no limit to human endurance. One day you fling yourself down dead-beat, fully convinced that the greatest claim on your resources had been made; the next finds you in the grip of a still harder test, from which you emerge triumphant with no little amazement. Standing under the weight of nearly ninety pounds of kit and having the recollections of exhausting marches with much less than that amount, I was far from anxious for a long tramp during that first Macedonian night. I can recall nothing in my whole army experience that was quite so bad. Against blinding rain and hurricane winds we squelched our way up between a

mass of dirty little hovels (alas for the dream picture as seen from the boat!), and were soon out on the bleak hills where a rough track of mud made the ascent extremely difficult. If the enemy had sent the winds to drive us back he could not have inspired them with greater determination, for as the rain increased the weight on our shoulders, the sudden gusts threatened to topple us over and to keep us struggling in the mire. So the drain on our strength was more rapid than usual, and as hour succeeded hour we became such wretched, weary mortals, that to touch a heel in front or to wobble against the man at your side was sufficiently irritating to provoke an angry curse or a scowl. Mount Olympus rose up austere and forbidding and, as we passed its massive form like pygmy intruders in tempestuous lands, I wondered whether the gods were enjoying the joke that Mars had perpetrated on civilized man.

I repeat, human endurance dies hard in the worst conditions, and we rallied sufficiently to put a covering over our heads and to huddle like saturated pups on the sodden ground. Within two hours, however, I had to be up again and out in the open, for the army never sleeps without its guard. I remember Thompson crawling in under the canvas and giving me a shake as the water dripped from his cap on to my face. Slowly my heavy eyes opened, and though I saw through his own strained features just the glimmer of a comradely smile, I felt an almost irresistible urge to clout him with my fist and to tell him and the whole British Army to go to hell. But, as usual, submission to the force of discipline took control, and I sullenly stepped over the sleeping bodies, pushed my way out into the driving rain, and left a warm spot for Thompson.

The treachery of war is not only in battles and the shedding of blood. It is also in the exposure to every kind of weather, in exhausting marches, and in the

jading effects of insufficient food and sleep. There is also the spiritual Gethsemane to which the official historian is a complete stranger. This was lived by the sentry standing solitary through the grim hours of the night reflecting on the tragedy of lost comrades, on weeping eyes and sorrowful hearts at home, and on the desecration of his own hopes and loves in life; by sensitive young men naturally averse to killing, waiting with blackened faces to go over the top and feeling the horror of plunging a bayonet into soft flesh or of having their own clean bodies mangled into a bloody mess.

As I walked about on guard during that awful Macedonian night, it seemed a pitiless world under those black skies, with not a star to send a comforting light into that vast chasm of gloom. Shivering with cold I had walked towards the transport lines and was startled first by the rattle of horses' chains and then by the sudden appearance of a driver who whacked a whip against his leggings as if to prove that he had flesh and blood.

'Hallo, chum, bloody unlucky to be on the 'oofs a night like this. Perishing cold country.'

'Hellish cold,' I replied, with more warmth than I felt.

'Wouldn't mind sharing a blanket with old Bulfin fer a couple of hours. I 'd soon beat 'im at snorin'.'

'Mustn't disturb the sleep of the brass hats,' vented my sarcasm, 'as it's so damned tiring dashing about in a Rolls-Royce.'

'You're right, chum. If they'd swop jobs fer a day they'd soon know there was a bloody war on.'

I felt much better after this brief conversation.

At dawn, we continued the march in such intense cold that leather jerkins, woollen jerseys, and thick gloves were barely sufficient to save us from freezing. If the rubbing of noses had become an army order it would certainly have been justified by appearances. To make matters worse, the piercing wind reached hurricane force so that when we came to fix up tents at Gabasel we had



to weight them down with big stones to keep them standing at all. And while we sat with blanched fingers munching hard biscuits and bully beef on those bleak, desolate hills our thoughts turned to the people at home busily preparing to celebrate Christmas on the following day.

It was no easy matter for the brigade band to 'Salute the happy morn,' without a few discordant sounds under arctic conditions, but the players did their best to preserve the right tunes of familiar carols and to pay homage to the spirit of the season. To the rank and file, however, the discords were by no means inappropriate, for the day was spent in lugging heavy stones from the hill-side and in being battered about by the fierce gale. A plate of hot stew formed our Christmas dinner, and a lot of grumbling took place when it became known that the officers' mess was like a banqueting hall, where turkey, wines, and cigars were part of the reward for services rendered. A drunken revelry was the outcome of this privileged celebration, in which a padre played a conspicuous part. The limit of our feasting was an extra rum ration and an extra vocal effort at carols, while other groups of men sat in the glare of candle-lights, gambling over cards.

The most humanizing event of those days was the arrival of the post. When the magic word went round a wild rush was made to the spot where the bulging bags of letters and parcels were emptied of their love-tokens and an expectant silence reigned for Corporal Bender to shout out the names of lucky recipients, who eagerly set about ravishing the long screeds with ferocious impatience. Those of us whose names were not called felt a sinking of the heart, deserted, and as if each one were left standing in a vacuous world. Some men were fortunate enough to hear their names called on every occasion; I heard mine but seldom. But the loneliest figure was Corporal Bender himself—the young man who distributed the post without, to my knowledge, ever

receiving a letter to call his own. I had noticed that, though he gave out hundreds of letters and parcels to an enraptured multitude, there was never any luck for him, and that he used to fade away after the proceedings like an orphan of the world. Having lost both parents and being absolutely friendless, he was indeed an orphan, and I often thought how pathetically he exemplified the Forgotten Soldiers, to whom friendly tokens from strangers would have meant a lightening of the load. The people at home who carried out this service spread more warmth than they knew.

The Greeks were not particularly well disposed to us and could be as wild as the surrounding country. The chief offenders were the nomads, a lawless tribe of people who wandered about in garish pantaloons marauding and murdering with every chance of escape. The farming peasants were more trustful and rather like a dear old miller who sat outside his door trying earnestly to impress his visitors with a profound message. Finding himself misunderstood, he instantly disappeared indoors and as quickly returned with three charming daughters dressed like the Three Graces of the classical age, each with a flaming rosette in her hair. But so proud was the old Greek of his attractive offspring that he ceremoniously wafted them out of sight after we had acknowledged the first smile. He then artfully diverted our attention to the mysteries of his milling machines.

Gabasel was the remnant of a village that had seen better days. On the walls of an old church there were a number of primitive paintings in which the most eminent gentleman was a black devil with a long red tongue and trailing tail furtively following a more human individual, who was seeking the light. A short distance away were the ruins of another church that had stood in the way of a bombardment of a previous war. The slab floor was covered with moss, and with the wind whistling through the paneless windows and the moonlight casting weird shadows on the walls, it was no place

for the timid wanderer to make midnight prowls in solitary contemplation. More useful was it as a rent-free debating centre for The Circle, whose members met there on a cold winter's night to hear a paper on 'The effect of venereal disease on the health of the nation,' which I gave with the aid of a candle that acted like a rebellious child. The listeners sat about like frozen gnomes on rocks, but as nothing circulates the blood better than an animated discussion, the temperature rose during the course of the meeting. A few days later we held a mock parliament of opposing political creeds and stormed the Speaker with questions on the tyranny of Tickler's jam, the prevailing gravity of beer, and on the disreputable practice of using the steel helmet as a wash-basin. Serious oratory arrived when the motion 'That pensions should be granted to disabled ex-service men and widows,' was proposed by the Liberals and opposed by the Conservatives. But the tide of oratory ran so high on this occasion that it overflowed into the camp and resulted in a number of missiles coming through the windows, and a hurried return 'To your tents, O Israel,' where we wrangled ourselves to sleep.

Our first minor engagement in this mountainous warfare was to break in a consignment of Argentine mules that were to be used for carrying the wounded over difficult country. Conquest was not easy, for these tough beasts came with no tender desires towards the sick and wounded, but rather with vicious intents to make casualties of those who dared interfere with their natural behaviour. They allowed the *cacolets* to be fixed on their backs, but as soon as the two 'patients' sat in the seats, up would go their hind legs and down would go their burden in a sorry heap on the ground. It was some time before the natural spirit subsided in the beasts when they became as docile as the mules on Blackpool sands.

No less untamed was the Macedonian country, which bore few traces of civilized control. At night the

croaking of the frogs vibrated through the air like a vast lamentation, and mingled with the doleful whine of jackals that prowled about in search of prey. A dead body attracted these wild dogs for miles around, and it was necessary to surround the mortuary tent with barbed wire and to drive them away with sticks. During the day rows of vultures sat on the rocks furtively watching for any carcass they could swoop down upon and claw into shreds, while the eagle, circling high under a clear blue sky, was an attractive sight until he joined his marauding companions and descended on the ration carts to tear chunks of meat from the cargo and keep us at a safe distance by the flapping of his huge wings. A short, prickly bush that lacerated the legs was another unpleasant evidence of nature in the raw.

The cold became so intense that men were frozen to death as they sat on their horses. Biting winds increased to hurricane force and brought down the tents as we lay asleep.

The brigade then concentrated at Spancova and camped in an exposed position on the hill-side. As the Red Cross flag was generally respected by enemy bombers, it was often the practice to include artillery sections and ammunition dumps in, or round about the safety zone. But as the airmen were up to these tricks, they soon celebrated our arrival by a bombing attack on our artillery neighbours. It was raining hard at the time and the first explosions killed a number of horses and caused others to stampede with gaping wounds, snorting with pain. Our job was to attend to the wounded men, of whom many had frightful injuries and died on the operating-table. One of these was a young gunner, whom I had seen fall with both feet blown away, and who was carried in on a stretcher, smoking a cigarette. This first bombing experience cast a gloom over the camp, for not having an atom of

protection it was an ominous foretaste of what was yet to come.

The German air squadrons, operating with the Bulgarian forces, were not long in attacking the canvas encampments of the division, ranged along the side of the hill. Probably they had never had such easy targets, or so little opposition from opposing forces. A wise administration, of course, would have taken precautionary measures against these attacks, but as G.H.Q. staff was safely installed in comfortable dug-outs, there was apparently no need to protect the life and limb of the lower ranks. It was a good day when the camps split up and a less inviting show was left for the bombers.

Preparations for a spring offensive were begun as soon as the warm weather arrived. For a number of weeks I helped in the excavation of a huge dug-out that was to act as a clearing-station for the wounded, and bivouacked in a ravine that was infested with snakes. They lurked among a galaxy of wild flowers of magnificent colouring and twined about the waters of a stream that twinkled in the sunlight. To tread on one meant a certain bite, and many men lost their lives. My own narrowest escape happened one night as I lay under the bivouac and was awakened by a slight hissing sound above my head. Opening my eyes I saw to my horror a large snake forcing his way through the earth, and actually brushing his body against my hair as he passed. To have moved would have been fatal, so I kept still in a sweat, and to my relief I saw his head disappear under the canvas roof while his long, shiny body serpentineed its way out. There was no further sleep for me that night. In the day-time we ventured up the ravine to watch scores of them sun-bathing in the marshy grass; they became such a dangerous enemy that a special squad of men, armed with sticks, were sent out to destroy a number of them. Private Butler (of Kew Gardens) was an expert at the job, and knew also how to take off

and treat the skins, which he then sold as souvenirs. Without the pests these ravines would have been gardens of delight.

Another enemy that had to be fought was the malarial mosquito that came up in swarms from the swamps of the Vardar and Struma valleys. And though strong doses of quinine became the order of the day, it was surprising how quickly big men crumpled up under malaria and helped to form an extensive casualty list. The larvae of the mosquito, that settled like foam over stagnant waters, were best destroyed by paraffin.

A more concrete natural obstacle was a massive hill known as 535, which overlooked the British lines and was well fortified by the enemy. This put our movements under observation for most of the time, and little could be done without drawing gun-fire and bombing raids. One Sunday morning a big squadron of planes came over and bombed a large field hospital, in which there were over three hundred patients. An awful death-roll resulted, and a strong protest was made against this inhuman attack. It was rumoured that a big dump of war material had been placed near the hospital and that the small Red Cross flag was unobserved by the airmen. After that tragedy a huge red cross design of fifty feet in diameter was set flat upon the ground.

By the spring of 1917 the plans for the big attack were well advanced. In fact, the details and dates had become such common knowledge among the troops that it was generally assumed that the enemy was equally well-informed on the matter. But Whitehall had to be impressed. The old generals were no doubt tired of not hearing 'sounds of battle' more often in their ears, and though Hill 535 was too impregnable to capture without additional strength to our forces, they were quite prepared to stage a 'grand demonstration,' for no other military reason than (to quote from an officer's remarks) 'to

keep the pot boiling.' The resultant loss of life would be among those who had no say in the matter.

After intensive training I was attached to a stretcher-party that was to co-operate with the 19th London Battalion after they had carried out a bombing raid on enemy trenches at the foot of Hill 535. On the night of the attack we set out under the control of Sergeant Dallwood, M.C. with stretchers and first-aid equipment, and crept along the wadi bed to take up a front line position. Occasional shells came over to let us know that the Bulgars were fully alive to our movements and were not to be taken by surprise. Thompson shouldered one end of the stretcher and I the other, and as the Very lights went up we all stood still until the illumination died down. Catching a glimpse of Swann's face in the full glare of the light he looked the essence of marine nausea, and I wondered whether we should all be sick before the night was out. Eventually we reached the trench, where men were busy blackening their faces in readiness for the raid. For a moment I thought I was in the make-up room of a theatre where a devilish show was to be given by clean young actors; yes, devilish show, I recollected, as I watched one of the actors prepare himself for the Dance of Death by emptying his pockets of belongings and filling a bag with bombs. Had I not seen them train on Salisbury Plain, when they threw imaginary bombs and bayoneted imaginary bodies strung up on a line?

It needed the super-courage of the conscious will to overcome the fears of the imagination, and one became aware of the individual struggle through the nervous tension of the whole. Irritability was the effort of the beast to break through, and whether your job was to throw bombs or to bandage bodies, your finer emotions had to give way to brute instincts as they would in a wild jungle. The next moment our artillery opened up such a crashing fire that Thompson trod on my toes and everybody's hair seemed to shoot up. The battle

had begun. Salvo after salvo of heavy calibre guns cataracted from one end of the plain to the other and projected a devastating, bewildering noise that shivered all the bones in the head. Soon the enemy artillery was replying to the bombardment. Thin whistling sounds rapidly expanding to a fierce crescendo as the shells plunged to earth and burst with the shattering force of a burst boiler into jagged red-hot fragments.

'Get away into that trench,' shouted an officer, pointing to a narrow slit in the earth a few yards in advance of the main position. 'Come on, make a dash for it.'

All I know is that the next moment I was crouching down in that trench with the nerve-racking fear that I was going to be a mangled corpse at any minute. The crashing explosions overhead were like a splitting of the brain and lumps of hot shrapnel dived into the surrounding earth with resounding thuds. And as each lump missed me I felt certain that I should be a target for the next. But luck held out and I was still intact when the strafe died down and the bombing parties commenced their assault on the enemy lines. We emerged to find no-man's-land lit up by huge mobile searchlights which glared down from Hill 535 like monstrous eyes that followed the movements of ghostly figures cutting their way through barbed wire and hurling bombs into trenches. Then the guns opened up afresh and in a few moments the whole place became a seething inferno of crashing bombs, exploding shells, withering machine-gun fire, and scorching shrapnel. It sounded as if the universe had gone mad. Black fountains of earth spluttered up in the glare of the Very lights and men fell back dead or with lacerated bodies.

Thompson and I struggled with a stretcher up to some barbed-wire entanglements and stumbled over a young bomber who was lying with a terrible gash near the shoulder-blade. Blood was also trickling down his blackened face from a small wound on the forehead, and as he moaned with pain, I saw a beseeching look



in his half-open eyes. In bandaging him up we had to increase rather than alleviate his suffering, and I remember being only half aware of the machine-gun bullets that thudded into nearby ground. Then we gently laid him on a stretcher and staggered our way back through ditches and over the rough ground to the dressing station. The enemy searchlights gave us the one advantage of expediting the journey with the least possible difficulty. Back on the battle-field I could see bodies lying across the barbed wire and others huddled up on the ground. A man staggers towards us holding his stomach, and as we put him on the stretcher, he keeps gasping out: 'A drink of water, chum; give me a drink of water.' As this would be fatal, we promise him a drink at the dressing station, well knowing that with a bullet in the stomach he would have to endure his thirst for a day or two.

The trench was soon filled with the dead and wounded, many of the latter having breathed their last before adequate treatment could be given. And the stillness of death contrasted rather mercifully with the agonies of the living, who lay moaning and groaning with unspeakable pain. Courage, pathos, and tragedy, which only the stars of heaven behold, are all concentrated in that small space. But one incident I shall never forget. A young fellow was brought in with a fractured leg and was put alongside another patient whose face he instantly recognized in the momentary glow of a Very light.

'Hallo, Jim, got a blighty one?' he anxiously inquires, as he turns to look at his wounded friend.

Jim's face remains unmoved and speaks only the message of death. His friend understands, sinks his head back on to the stretcher, and gazes silently into the night.

An advanced dressing station was the scene of steady, unemotional efficiency. Every patient was examined by the medical officer and labelled for the extra treatment he was to receive after first aid; then he was carried

to a clearing centre further back before being evacuated down the line. On this occasion the task was unusually difficult on account of the roads being under enemy observation and constant gun-fire. Yet there was no halting or shrinking from the work that had to be done. Exposed to shrapnel and flying bullets, I marvel to this day how Thompson and I managed to get through that night without being hit, for red-hot pieces hissed through the darkness and missed us by inches. Perhaps it was 'just the luck of the game,' as Thompson would say.

The breaking of dawn over a battle-field is one of the saddest scenes the eye can behold. The hideous signs of the night's destruction come into view—dead bodies or seriously wounded men half hidden in a ditch, pieces of blood-bespattered clothing hanging from treacherous barbed wire, rifles and lumps of shell-casing and gaping holes, round which the earth is mixed up with the flesh and blood of many a victim. As the morning light came over the hills to inquire into the frenzy of the night before, it was like emerging from a horrible dream. Then it was that you privately prayed for a slight wound or a convenient breaking down of health that would get you to the base. This was not cowardice or selfishness but a natural reaction to the situation. But while this prayer remained unanswered you carried on in a mechanical manner and placed yourself at the mercy of a mysterious destiny. This enabled you to lose all sense of fear and to continue working under exposed conditions when broad daylight brought one in full view of the enemy. To his credit, however, he allowed us to carry away the wounded with little interference, though he could easily have blown us all to kingdom come. For hour after hour we carried broken bodies over difficult roads to the clearing station and kept rallying our strength when complete exhaustion seemed to be imminent. When a few hours' sleep was possible I threw myself down to find a swift release from the ennobling glory of war.

After storm the peace. A squandering of young, healthy lives and the military gods were appeased. Hill 535 stood as formidable as before, and so we returned to the cover of the ravine and the flowery carnival of spring. We all remained highly sensitive to what we had to face and were content to lie in the sun and silently project our thoughts beyond the strife. My own reverie was broken by the appearance of Thompson smoking a fat cigar.

'You blithering plutocrat,' remarked Swann before I could vent my curiosity. 'Where did you scrounge that thing?'

Thompson applied the ritual of a West End club.

'Did you say "scrounge," my dear Bert? You can only scrounge cigars by having your fingers trodden on—a practice I naturally abhor. Dost like the aroma?'

At that moment a number of shells came whizzing over and a quick dive was made for the dug-out. As Thompson's cigar was blamed for drawing the fire, he paid the penalty by allowing a number of puffs all round.

The next evening a party of us were returning from the main dressing station when a thrilling aerial battle induced us to halt on the crest of a hill and the enemy to send over a few shells in recognition of our daring exposure. Falling flat on our stomachs my position happened to be between Ted Knight and a sandy-haired youth familiarly known as 'Bonfire,' and in the brief silence that followed the explosions Ted's voice could be heard through the screening grass: 'Stand up, Bonfire, and show yer napper; they 'll think we're the setting sun.' On another occasion Ted was the last to take cover when some strafing was on. Dashing into the dug-out, to the corporal's remonstrance he replied: 'Blimey, corp., can't I save me cap-badger from being blown away.'

Here I enjoyed a number of days in reading *A Tale of Two Cities*, and in sending contributions to the *Balkan*

*News*, which was a racy little news sheet published by the military authorities. One day I saw a British officer whip an elderly Greek for some trifling offence in connection with road-making, which aroused me to write an article which the editor promptly refused. War history is notorious for its omissions. There was, for instance, the extensive employment of Greek labour in the construction of an arterial road from the war zone to the coast, when hundreds of Greek men and women were paid a good sum a day for hauling lumps of stone in crazy little carts drawn by oxen. It was strange how the army authorities were always able to pay for such labour at a much higher rate than that received by their own rank and file.

The heat now became intense and the mosquitoes correspondingly active. Malarial casualties far exceeded those of battle and bomb, and attacks had to be made on the pestilential swamps. Pure water became a rarity and few thirsts could be adequately satisfied. One afternoon I was at a temporary dressing station that was in charge of a lieutenant who was notoriously snobbish about rank, when the colonel and his batman drove up, dripping with perspiration. 'You look hot, colonel,' said the young subordinate with a patronizing air. 'Have a cup of tea before you go on; I'm just about to have one myself.'

'I shall be obliged if you will bring my batman one,' replied the colonel in a significant tone of voice. The lieutenant disappeared, looking rather subdued.

It was noticeable, however, that whatever shortage there was in other things, the canteens were never short of beer. The brewers saw to that. In the fullness of patriotic fervour they strained every industrial sinew to supply the ammunition of drink, though that ammunition had the inverted effect of helping us to lose, rather than to win, the war.

If the rum ration had any emergency value it was due more to the abnormal conditions of war than to any intrinsic merit of its own. A stimulant of some sort was absolutely necessary when the pulse was lowered by exposure, and teetotal enthusiasts who naïvely imagined that hot cocoa could supply the need, might just as well have asked for manna from heaven. Had the drink trade been restricted to the supply of rum to demonstrate its patriotism, there might have been much howling at the company meetings, but the havoc resulting from giving them *carte blanche* would have been avoided. No doubt every brewery shareholder, from the bishop to the bailiff, felt an expanding of heart for a war that could fatten up their dividends, and for a Parliament that winked the eye at the ill-gotten plunder. There will be no hesitation in renewing the licence for the next war.

The liveliest part of the Salonika front was in the air. Towards the end of our stay a fleet of the huge Gotha 'planes, known as the 'German Travelling Circus,' made constant bombing raids over our lines and threatened to blow everything to extinction. A big ammunition dump at Karasouli went up in a terrific explosion, after which the rumour went round that we should have to retreat. The fact was that a stalemate had set in and that the 60th London Division was to go travelling again to extend its overseas history. The call had come from Palestine.

The trek down to Salonika was distinguished by the intense heat and the 'homeward journey' of S.M. Baum with malaria. This old stalwart had weathered the storm of active service much better than we expected and there was a sadness of farewell as he lay on the stretcher tearful-eyed and trying to respond to the good wishes of 'his boys,' whom he had fathered since the birth of the unit. A little too human to be a successful soldier, our hope was that he would make a safe return to health and to his little cigar shop at Croydon.

After a succession of devilish marches in full pack (made a little more bearable by the issue of tropical clothing) we encamped for a number of days outside Salonika and were entertained by the Roosters Concert Party, which had already been formed in the division. It is a remarkable fact that as I write, more than twenty years after that first Salonika performance, Percy Merriman, the founder of the party, can still entertain British audiences with some of the original members.

Diversion was certainly necessary during those June days of 1917, for with the *Minnetonka* waiting in harbour to transport us to Egypt, and still no prospect of a 'blighty leave,' conditions were ripening for open rebellion. But we simply grouched our way on board and wondered in what year of grace we should see the white cliffs of Dover again.

## PALESTINE

There were no beds on the *Minnetonka*, at least not for the rank and file, so we crowded on the old decks for the two days' journey. As General Bulfin and his staff were on board the regimental band was there, and a fine musical programme was given, in which vocal exuberance far exceeded the instrumental. The fate of the *Ivernia* reawakened apprehensions concerning our own safety, but the dreaded submarines again allowed us a peaceful passage, and on 19th June 1917 we landed at Alexandria and entrained the next day for Ismailia.

The spell of Egypt gripped us immediately and put a fresh vitality into our blood. To see the gilded minarets glistening among the palms, and the white-robed natives in the picturesque fez carrying on the immemorial customs amid sand and sunshine, was a pleasant contrast to the rugged wildness of the Macedonian country. And what better tonic could we have than a daily plunge into the Suez Canal, wherein we disported till our bodies were brown and the prowess of the best swimmers slowed down the passing tugs and almost made friends with the gambolling porpoise. Then we raided the little cafés of the town where a half a dozen fried eggs could be got for a few piastres. Not having enjoyed the luxury of a civilized meal for months a general clamour arose for 'des œurf, mister; big omelet, quick,' which set the harassed proprietor dripping with perspiration and the frying-pan working at high pressure to keep pace with the demand. But he sweated most over the job of collecting the money, for not having yet mastered the fresh values, most of his customers swore they were being overcharged. So, to expedite matters and to avoid having to give an arithmetical lesson at each transaction, the caterer astutely feigned complete ignorance of the English language and obtained full payment

by sorrowfully pleading through signs and symbols a scrupulous observance of business honesty. Perhaps there was less fleecing of the British soldier abroad than there was of his dependants on the home front.

An ironic aspect of army administration was that though our rations were poor and uninviting the canteens were always well stocked with attractive 'extras' that tempted us to improve our diet at the expense of our pocket. Most of our small pay went to swell the canteen funds, which meant that we partially kept ourselves in addition to serving King and Country. To the well-paid colonial troops the position of the British soldier was always a conundrum.

The officers had no need of a canteen. Promptly at seven o'clock each evening, the brigade band took up position outside the 'Holy of Holies,' as we called the officers' mess, to render musical homage to the brass hats as they put away six-course dinners and expanded over wine and whisky as a tribute to the strength and wealth of the British Empire. And when the proceedings wound up to the tunes of *Land of Hope and Glory* and the National Anthem, one could not help feeling that the War had its compensations, despite the daily roll of honour and the colossal cost of prosecution.

From Ismailia the division went to Kantara, which was now the main base of the forces operating in Palestine. This was situated at the entrance of the great Sinai desert and was in thorough keeping with its surroundings. From the Tommy's point of view this vast camp was a symbol of all the debasing elements that formed the military machine. It had no soul. Reared on a dreary wilderness of sand, it resembled a penal settlement of tents and timber, where a harsh, calculating discipline pressed on the men with the object of driving them into depression and back into the firing line. Unless you had a permanent job in the camp, you were treated as a potential malingerer, and though you had been sent down to 'rest' you were soon glad



to make the return journey to Palestine. Nothing bred discontent quicker than the imposition of senseless duties that reduced the men to the level of brainless serfs, and the most notorious of these was a periodical kit inspection that served a less useful purpose than a pagan rite. The idea was to keep us constantly active in polishing and cleaning every morsel of equipment so that on appointed days we could spread them out in the sun, stand for hours in the broiling heat awaiting the pleasure of the inspecting officers to come along, and to hear their critical comment on the dazzling idols of belts and buttons, as if the course of the war depended on the lustre of these trifles. The brightening of brain and morale was of secondary importance to the polish on a boot and the slightest default led to a dose of pack-drill by which to restore the military efficiency of men who knew more about the battle-field than did most of the superior officers. To the old sweats in command, the best soldiers were those whose finer feelings had been battened to a pulp, and whose sense of duty depended on the bullying coercion of brutal discipline. There also probably existed a certain amount of official fear, for the new armies sustained sufficient intelligence to show an uneasy resentment against stupid authority and the wide division between officers and men. And in the latter respect there was sufficient evidence at Kantara to cause a rebellion. As all the foodstuffs were amassed here for distribution, it was more than idle rumour that charged the officers with helping themselves to all the choice things before the residue was sent to the men at the front. In fact, officers who were never destined to approach the firing line or to forfeit a night's sleep in comfortable beds enjoyed a standard of living that was worth protecting, and therefore they pressed their claims in proportion as they tried to browbeat the common soldier into unquestioning submission. Hence one of the most memorable jobs I was called on to perform during the torrid heat of the day was that of

dragging a weighted sack over the sand between the officer's tents to obliterate the footprints, and so preserve an even surface for the darlings of the gods to walk upon. As many of them had no other footprints to show I often thought my task was rather sacrilegious. Another edifying duty was to act as guard over the officers' latrines, lest perchance a mortal of lesser breed should wander in and desecrate this holy sanctuary. Truly, if the ghostly figure of the old Duke of Wellington wandered over that camp he must have been mightily pleased how well his former dictum of the British soldier being 'social scum, without decency and respect,' was regarded by his successors.

Fortunately, our first experience of Kantara was short, for the division was soon transported over the vast Sinai desert to the region of Belah, where we commenced intensive training for the big offensive that was about to be launched. Here the camel came into our midst, the first contingent sauntering out of the unknown like travellers from the dawn of time. But the romantic flavour of the beasts was best appreciated from a distance, for they had an abominable smell, repulsive teeth, and foamed at the mouth as if through internal disorder. The native attendants managed them like children, though they could lash out with their feet to show their annoyance. At the word 'Barrac' they went down on to their front knees, pushed their bodies back to bend the rear legs, then made a forward and backward movement again to settle on the sand. In loading them they had a nasty habit of suddenly turning the head and grabbing at your arm with their vicious yellow teeth. In extreme anger they chased the natives over the desert and showed little resemblance to the docile nature suggested by the pictures of the schoolroom. And so rough-hewn and awkward was their physical make-up that they looked like freaks of nature and among the last survivals of the mastodon age.

The sign of the 60th London Division was the Bee,

which General Bulfin originated as a compliment to the initial letter of Bonaparte. But so far as the general was concerned the Bee took flight to corps headquarters and in came General Shea to take charge of the division. With the arrival of Allenby many of the old sweats had to give way to younger officers, who had more psychological knowledge of the new armies, and it is interesting to find General Bulfin paying the following tribute in a preface to a book written after the War:

'The point that struck me most about the division [the 60th] was the extraordinary quickness, intelligence, and alertness of the rank and file. . . . To one used to handling the regular troops, this high plane of intelligence struck me very forcibly. The rank and file were above my expectations.'

Colonel Corfe, the C.O. of the 2/5th London Field Ambulance, also had to swallow a bitter pill by being superseded by Colonel Lunn, who hailed from the Indian Army. Drastic as these changes were they nevertheless improved the spirit and efficiency of the division. And the new note was struck by General Shea when he made the first inspection. What mattered to him was the man behind the buttons and belt, and he soon found out what kind of material he was called on to manage.

'How old are you?'

'Seventeen, sir.'

'Rather young. Did you come out with the division?'

'Yes, sir.'

'What did you do at home?'

'I was studying to join my parents on the stage.'

'Who are your parents?'

'The Martin Harveys, sir.'

'Well done to be out here at your age. I hope you will get through safely and make good on the stage yourself.'

Such was the sort of dialogue that went on as the general passed down the line, with the result that he gained the confidence and respect of the rank and file

without the irritating discipline exerted by his predecessor. There was little danger of the infantry now having to polish buttons in the front line trench, as many had been compelled to do in France.

There is little doubt that Allenby created a new spirit among all his troops and the right psychological conditions for a successful offensive. Many divisions, before his arrival, had suffered severe setbacks, and his drastic purge of the administrative staff was a necessary safeguard against repetition. The 2/5th L.F.A. moved on to Shellal, where training was adapted to desert warfare and the camel became the chief means of transport and for the evacuation of the wounded. We also learned that the mystery of the desert was not entirely the fiction of romantic writers. Awful in its immensity, it threatened to swallow you up unless you made friends with it and learned to control its enormous strength. To move about at night meant calling in the aid of the stars, for if you relied on your own sense of direction you soon found yourself wandering about in circles over that trackless waste. And so deceptive were appearances that a light in the darkness might have been a candle-flame a few yards away or a condensed illumination many miles in the distance. During one of our mid-night excursions in star-gazing we came across some old trenches of a previous war, which contained a number of open catacombs strewn with human skulls and bones. The remains of Arab or Turkish soldiers, whose bodies had been flung into the recesses as soon as they had fallen, they so intrigued the medical mind of Captain Steadman that we spent the rest of the night in putting together human skeletons and in learning more about the science of osteology.

To guard against dysentery all the drinking water was chlorinated and carried in fanatis which were strapped on to the camels' backs. A daily ration was allowed each man and had to suffice for shaving, washing, and drinking. As thirst, like the heat, was always with us,

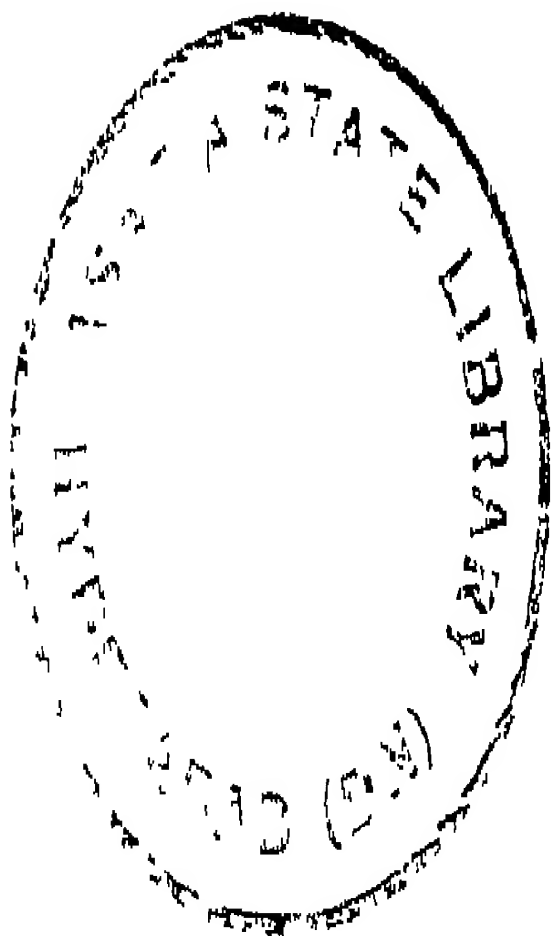
water became more precious than the piastre notes in our pockets. More tantalizing still were the scorpions, which too often changed their lodgings in the sand for a dark corner of our clothes. The sleeve of a jacket was their favourite hiding-place, and while we slept peacefully under the stars they would get into position to give a stinging bite with their poisonous tails if we were unwary enough not to discover them on the following morning. The safest precaution was to turn our clothes inside out before going to sleep. Mosquitoes were also here in abundance, and though we lay covered with nets to keep out the marauders they always managed to find some secret entry and draw on our blood before the night was out.

In recording these experiences I am not so much concerned with the military strategy of the campaign as with the common happenings and feelings of the men whose struggles I shared, but a brief outline of Allenby's scheme will serve to make more intelligible the role played by the 60th London Division in helping to bring the campaign to a successful issue.

The Turkish line extended from the sea coast beyond Gaza to Beersheba, which was flanked by a waterless desert that offered a natural protection against an advancing army. Twice had British troops failed to capture Gaza, which, owing to its being the pivot of communications, had been restrengthened and fortified by German engineers. The Turks were therefore led to believe that the major attack would again be made at this point, but Allenby secretly concentrated forces on the Beersheba flank with the object of 'rolling up' the enemy line and compelling retreat from his strongest defences. Water was the chief problem in this enterprise, for if wells were destroyed and the advance were held up for lack of supplies a general retreat might become imperative. By adopting every available pre-



*Private Garratt, 2/5th L.F.A., 1915*



caution, however, General Allenby took the risk and appointed the 60th London Division to strike the first blow.

The first movement of the 2/5th London Field Ambulance began on Sunday, 28th October 1917, when we trekked over the desert in the direction of the Wadi Ghuzze. As there was not a breath of wind to carry the sand away the column moved along in a dense fog of surface dust that parched the throat and made clowns of our perspiring faces. At nightfall we entered the basin of the wadi, down which the waters swirled in the rainy season and left eerie shapes of mud and sand sticking out from the sides. Getting the camels down the slopes was an awkward business and some of the more heavily laden toppled over during the process. More successful were the young horses that scrunched the ambulance wagons over the shingle and jerked their heads as if they were thoroughly enjoying the jaunt. Strict instructions against smoking or showing lights of any description had been strongly emphasized, but true to army anomaly a high-powered official car came dashing up with glaring headlights and passed on in front as if its occupants (heroic young brass hats) were throwing a searchlight on all that was happening. Thompson remarked that they had merely come to see that the prohibition was being properly enforced on the rank and file. After a gruelling march we snatched a couple of hours' sleep among the dunes and to the melancholy howls of jackals.

I awoke to my five-hundredth day of active service, which I had seen through without a break. I then did a little mental stocktaking of myself and the cause. The enthusiasm which accompanied me to France and allowed a generous expression of the cardinal virtues as a patriotic sign of self-sacrificing zeal had long given way to the conviction that the war had become a settled job without thrill or romance and worthy only of a sullen devotion to duty that forfeited not too much



self-interest. Like that of most 'old campaigners,' the volunteer spirit had subsided in the knowledge that the bright bubbles of a 'common sacrifice,' the suspension of 'class distinction,' and 'the war to end war' had been burst by the orgy of profiteering and financial jobbery, by the stampede of aristocratic rank and filers into safe and cushy positions, and by the cynical attitude of press and politicians towards the promise of a world made safe for democracy. The most that one could hope for was that out of the conflict would emerge a sufficient controlling force to ensure that justice would be done to the men and families who had given their all and that something would speedily happen to terminate the insensate slaughter of the finest manhood of the civilized world. For the moment millions of disillusioned men submitted to a monstrous fate and I marvelled at the success with which organized discipline, operating from the apex of the army pyramid, managed to keep them in control. In practice, of course, the rank and file kept one another in control, for generals could always rely on execution squads carrying out the letter of the law. But higher up the pyramid the discipline was a paler pink, for delinquent officers were either sent home (delightful thought!) or given another command to ease their responsibility. To what extent the pyramid would have withstood the absence of pride and rivalry of rank, honours, stripes, chevrons, and medals, was a poser best left to the psychologist.

I was jerked out of these reflections by our heavy artillery suddenly opening up an intensive bombardment of the Turkish positions. As we advanced, the first batch of prisoners was brought in, looking a picture of human dereliction. Mostly Arabs in ragged native clothes, they were dirty, famished, and miserable, many with hordes of flies skirmishing round bleeding wounds, and all of them looking as if they had been forced into the trenches by Turkish taskmasters. They received good treatment, however, from the British escort, and

after gifts of cigarettes, biscuits, and tea they brightened up and offered us all the small possessions they had. One man showed me homely photographs of his family with emotional pride. The three Turkish officers who accompanied them were well uniformed and showed a dignified reserve, but there was no mistaking the background of racial cruelty to be seen in their faces. They seemed surprised that we treated the Arabs as human beings.

Our own wounded had a painful journey over the stony wadi bed. The slightest jolting was agonizing to patients with fractured bones and lacerated bodies, but in the small sand-carts they were jerked from side to side, and indicated their suffering by shrieks that mingled with the scream of shells overhead. The only relief I could give them was to lift up the lower end of the stretcher for as long a period as my strength would allow. At Motor Rendezvous the patients were reclassified and the serious cases rushed to the casualty clearing station for immediate operations. Fortunately a Scotch doctor was in charge of the Rendezvous and his cheery humour helped to lighten and brighten the depressing scene.

'Put the wee laddie there,' he instructed, as he smiled at the 'wee laddie' of over six feet in length.

'A bonnie bandage over that and ye'll be fit forra trip round the worrld.'

Then I saw him gently put a mug of tea to the lips of a bloodstained patient, with the remark: 'Hae a wee drappee of this hame brew, me son, for auld lang syne.' The Scotch doctors were rare fellows for efficiency and sympathetic understanding.

As the Turks retired, we advanced over filthy ground that was alive with flies and mosquitoes. The inflated carcasses of dead camels and horses also gave off repugnant odours, while the dirty little dug-outs deserted by the enemy were breeding-nests of disease. In searching the wreckage of these dug-outs, however, I was moved by the sight of small articles that signified a common

humanity. 'Letters from home,' snap photographs of smiling women and children, old socks and handkerchiefs, an empty purse, small mirrors, a shaving-brush, and a variety of oddments and clothing all lay strewn about as symbols of a once ordered life. How many of the owners were also now part of the universal wreckage? . . .

News arrived that Beersheba had fallen and that the Turks were in retreat. This heartened us considerably, for we hoped they would continue to retreat and help us and themselves to get home as quickly as possible. But this bright picture was short-lived. As the column moved towards the conquered town a number of German planes swooped down and bombed the infantry in front. The horses and camels stampeded, and native drivers were hoisted in the air as they clung to the ropes. The casualties were treated on the spot, though many of the men died through wounds. To be at the mercy of bombs without an atom of protection gave a feeling of helplessness that numbed one into inaction.

That night we lit camp-fires on grassy slopes and crunched hard biscuits as we lay down to rest. On the other side of the river the form of the white mosque showed dimly in the darkness and the plonking feet of an endless procession of loaded camels were like a lullaby to the weary. Swann said that he would much rather hear the feet of the Queen of Sheba coming towards him. Dawn was heralded by another bombing raid, the object being to smash the bridge over which we had to pass. The raiders succeeded in smashing only camels and horses, which lay about with blood oozing from ghastly wounds.

Passing through Beersheba we commenced a forced march over the desert in the trail of the retreating Turk. Only the maximum of physical fitness could have endured the ordeal, for with the broiling sun overhead and the shifting sand underfoot, it was remarkable how we managed to go mile after mile without crumpling up. I could have wrung my shirt, wet with perspiration, and have cheerfully drunk the moisture, so as to give a little

relief to my sand-choked throat. For thirst became excruciating and the shortage of water a serious problem. The wells of Sheria had to be taken that night at all cost, and the London infantry were hurrying on to face a stubborn defence. Fortunately for the camels they could store a few days' supply of water in their internal cisterns, but so slow was the process of satisfying their needs that thousands were drawn up at the only watering-place available and many dropped down and died while awaiting their turn. The animals took priority over men in both food and drink.

The 19th battalion was again bombed *en route*, and Fulcher and I escorted the convoy of wounded back to Beersheba. On the return journey some of the drivers fell asleep as they sat on the horses, while the steaming animals looked as if they were being propelled along by mechanical means. We arrived to find our comrades singing homely songs around a huge camp-fire. Fatigue provides an easy outlet for the softer sentiments, and as we stood under the midnight stars with thoughts straying back to the homeland, we became like children relieved of all the cares of the day.

The battle of Sheria was a desperate affair and resulted in a heavy casualty list. An advanced dressing station that we fixed up in a ravine was heavily shelled, and it was a difficult task getting the dead and wounded away. When it became known that one of our young stretcher-bearers had been killed outright and a number of others wounded, a gloomy foreboding settled on the corps, but the unruffled leadership of Colonel Lunn was always reassuring. The enemy had retreated from the wells and a message of thanks had been received from General Shea. There was nothing better than the sound of victory to keep up the spirits.

But there was no rest for the division. The splendid London infantry which had beaten down the dogged

resistance of the Turkish army was ordered to follow up the retreat over a ten-mile area of difficult ground. Points had to be reached and battles fought to keep the line intact, and though it meant forced marching on the barest amount of sleep, food, and drink, miracles seemed to emerge out of every order. The Turks were fighting a rearguard action away somewhere in kingdom come. Trudging along under the intense noonday heat the sweat so flooded my face that I was glad to catch the falling drops in my mouth. By God, what would we have not given for a bucket of water! To feed day after day on hard biscuits and raisins was unappetizing enough, but the gnawing agony of a desert thirst excelled every other hardship. As a fleet of our bombing 'planes rushed overhead towards the enemy positions, someone remarked that it would be a finer strategic move to drop us bottles of beer instead of bombs on the b—— Turks.

At one point we came near a heavy battery of artillery that was pounding away under the direction of an observation aeroplane. Stripped to the waist, the gunners hauled the shells into the breech and then jumped away before the repercussion stabbed the surrounding air. So severe was the repercussion that a sand-cart was blown over while attempting to pass. Then I was put in charge of a convoy of seriously wounded men who had to be evacuated as quickly as possible. I arrived at the clearing station to find the place congested owing to the lack of transport. An old building was crowded with stretcher cases in charge of a single orderly, while scores of patients were lying outside, suffering the torment of flies and sun. I still have the picture of young Turkish wounded crouched up against a wall, with blood dripping from saturated bandages, and a plague of flies attacking them with irritating persistency. As soon as they saw my water-bottle, they frantically pleaded to me to give them a drink. One of them burst into tears when I turned the bottle upside-down to prove that it was empty. But it was a harrowing

spectacle. As little could be done for patients in urgent need of operations, one could only leave them at the gates of death and curse the delay in sending transport. In the economy of army control it was more profitable to attend to the minor injured and quickly restore them to the fighting strength than to concentrate on the more seriously wounded. During rapid advances, the evacuation of stretcher-cases was always a difficult problem, and there was invariably an unholy congestion to fray the nerves of those left in control. It was a trying ordeal after fatiguing marches and with the blood thinned by torrid heat and the lack of water and food, to be faced by this human wreckage, the awful wounds and the livid cheeks of the dying, to whose last moments of suffering we could bring no relief. A comforting word or an extra bandage was poor consolation, and it was not surprising that some of the more sensitive men broke down under the strain. I remember Jack King, the most vigorous of the Seven Companions, sobbing like a child and setting off young Jack Harvey. Those war correspondents who wrote glibly about the 'smiling Tommies' after weeks and weeks of hellish campaigning, and with no prospect of the rest of which they were desperately in need, never shared the sweat of the forced marches or the night-life of 'The broken heralds of a doleful day.' Smiles came during the brief interludes after battle or when the heart was lightening a little of the sickening demands made upon it. There is no such thing as a healthy smile when prosecuting the horrors of war.

The next dawn we halted on the heights overlooking the blasted town of Sheria. As the darkness lifted there came into view on the plain below an immense cavalcade of cavalry drawn up in mass-formation and ready to move off for attack. As the men sat rigid on perfectly still horses it was more like a picture from a book than actual life and when the commanding officer shouted: 'Come on, boys, get over the wadi before it's light,' and the whole

concourse started a slow movement towards the defile, I stood thrilled by the picturesque yet ominous display. Indeed, it opened up the most momentous day of my war experience.

Following in the wake of the yeomanry, we passed the wreckage of Sheria and continued the forced march over the desert in the direction of Huj. The Londoners were fighting their way to capture this position by the evening and were overcoming strong resistance from an enemy that took every advantage of the rises and depressions of the ground. It was a gruelling hot day and the small water ration was a mocking allowance for the thirst we developed, while the rapid advance of the infantry compelled us to keep a good pace. With four miles between them and their objective, however, the infantry were held up by a determined stand of Turkish artillery across their front. General Shea, observing the position, and noticing ten troops of Warwickshire and Worcestershire Yeomanry close at hand, immediately ordered Lieut.-Colonel H. Cheape, their commander, to charge the guns and capture them at all costs. This was accomplished in true Balaclava fashion, and the troops that faced the muzzles of the guns met the shattering force of shells that were set to explode at the cannon's mouth. But neither shell, shrapnel, nor machine-gun could withstand the unflinching onrush of the yeomanry, and when we arrived on the scene a little time later the eleven captured guns stood silent on the battle-field. The first portents of the slaughter were the number of swords stuck in the ground and the riderless horses, wandering about. Round the guns lay a sickening heap of carnage awaiting our attention—men and animals lying shattered in pools of blood. At first there seemed no life at all, and while a field hospital was hastily being put up, Jack Harvey and I were sent with a stretcher to bring in any man still breathing. That Jack Harvey happened to be detailed for the job was a strange coincidence of fate, for it led

to one of the most dramatic meetings of the war. As soon as we arrived at the spot, a young German youth suddenly stood up among the wreckage apparently unharmed, and fixing his eyes on Jack Harvey, exclaimed in good English, after a momentary shock: 'Hallo, Jack, fancy meeting you here,' which so dumbfounded Jack that he had difficulty in stretching out the greeting hand. I was the only witness of this incident and I felt as though the heavens had fallen or as if a monstrous joke were being played on us. Was it possible that two boys who reflected none of the hates of war could be among the millions that formed the opposing armies and then meet as friends amid the slaughter of the battle-field? I was bursting to shout the news, to send cables to the Archbishop of Canterbury, Lord Northcliffe, and the Prime Minister, to show how two boys had sent the myth of racial antagonism crashing to the ground. But I will not enlarge, for the reader will share my realization of the stupidity of war. The friendship of the two boys was explained by the fact that the young German attended the same school with Jack before the war, and was called up for service when hostilities broke out. On that eventful day around Huj he had been left behind by the yeomanry to look after the wounded and in a short time he was sent down to assist in one of the base hospitals.

We had a grim task that afternoon in cleaning up the tragic legacy of the charge. British, Turkish, and Austrian victims all lay huddled together with terrible wounds, many more dead than alive. Colonel Cheape, who led the charge, received a shrapnel wound in the shoulder, and when talking about the battle, he paid a tribute to the bravery of the enemy in sticking to the guns until the horses were nearly on top of them. This was borne out by the fact that one horse had a shell pass clean through its neck before the shell had time to explode. Some of the wounded died as we lifted them on to the stretchers, and one young yeoman left me with the painful memory of his passing away while trying to



gasp out a final request concerning his mother. I noticed that the thoughts of the dying were always centred on home.

Burying the dead was a hasty ceremony carried out with silent reverence. Large holes were dug in the sand and the bodies were put in side by side in the blood-stained uniforms in which they had fallen. Then we erected little wooden crosses as simple memorials to those who had answered the Last Post. The dead horses were also buried with care and attention.

Early next morning we scoured the surrounding ditches and dunes and found a number of wounded who had lain hidden from view. One famished Turk was eating the horse-food, to which he had crawled, while a sabred gunner had bled to death with half his face slashed away. Later on the prisoners were escorted in by the hundreds—abject processions of half-starved, demoralized, and derelict men, among whom was a fine old Syrian doctor who, to our dismay, came leading in a young, fat pony, on which was seated his plump young daughter. This girl showed not a trace of fear in her extraordinary surroundings and, understanding a little English, both she and her father soon gained the admiration of our lads and smiled their way through the camp. They had come into the war solely to serve suffering humanity and were neutral about everything else. After these surprises I began to think that Huj would be a suitable site for a new International White House of Peace!

By this time we were thoroughly 'lousy, leaden-eyed, and limp,' to use the alliteration of army poetics, and in urgent need of a rest. From the beginning of the offensive we had been living on biscuits and dates, and sores broke out over our bodies. Fortunately something soon happened that brought the division a few days' respite, and branching off from the scene of fierce en-

counters north of Sheria we marched to a secluded spot behind some vegetation and gladly became immune from the attentions of the enemy and from the odorous atrocities he had left in his trail. On one particular journey from this point I was able to find the way by following the Turkish corpses that lay along the route.

If cleanliness is next to godliness it was not long before we had risen from the barbarian state to a more lofty appearance. A ruthless attack on beards restored the face of youth, and bodies that had not felt the tang of cold water for months were given fresh cleanliness. Then we sat in the sun and deloused our shirts like industrious baboons. Swann, whom we humorously called the Hairy Ape, supported an endless supply, and took a gruesome delight in squelching the brutes on the lid of Thompson's mess-tin, while the latter sat unobservantly writing a letter. And this reminds me of the arrival of the post—a heap of stuff that had been held up down at the base. What an evening that was when all the arrears of letters had to be read and parcels unpacked. Yes, unpacked so that the luscious contents could be quickly repacked in the famished stomachs waiting to receive them. And though there were many who, like myself, seldom received a parcel, the communal spirit of the men put us more or less on equal terms. As none of the rank and file was an isolationist, no one was left out of the feast, and as this meant treading down the selfishness of hunger only comradeship *in excelsis* could make such action possible. I recall in particular the unfailing generosity of the two Braby brothers, whose expansive largess was distributed as manna from heaven, and I never pass their offices in Euston Road even to this day without looking up at the halo. Another memorable scene during that rest period was that of General Shea being informally surrounded by a crowd of London infantry whom he was thanking for the victorious part they had played in the struggle. As a tactician he was as good off the stage of battle as when he was on it.

On 19th November we moved in the direction of Gaza (which had now fallen), and passed over the grassy slopes that had been no-man's-land since the unsuccessful attacks of the previous campaign. Nothing was more refreshing than a green landscape after the monotonous dreariness of desert sand, but our pleasure was spoilt by having to pick our way among exposed remains of British soldiers, whose decomposing bodies were half out of the soil. This ground had been the scene of stern battles since time immemorial, and the strength of the Turkish defences led them to believe that the position was impregnable. The town of Gaza had been considerably damaged, but the typical Eastern fatalism showed up in the shepherds bringing out flocks of sheep and instantly reviving pastoral pursuits as if nothing had happened. Vendors came with baskets of Jaffa oranges that seemed the most luscious fruit in the world. Ye gods, how the juice eased our parched throats! I would willingly have spent the rest of my life in those groves at Jaffa.

Leaving Gaza we followed the track of the Turk towards Latron and kept in view the single-lined railway that had been the mainstay of enemy transit. Captured German engines were being used and the route for miles was strewn with the wreckage of retreat. We were now advancing over fertile country which gradually ascended towards the Palestine hills in the distance. From one elevation we caught a passing glimpse of the blue Mediterranean and wondered how long it would be before we sailed those waters again. To Fulcher we appeared as one of the lost tribes condemned to wander on for ever, while Thompson read our fate in one of the prophetic passages of Revelation. But these reflections changed with the climate, for the atmosphere became much colder and a dark, threatening sky spread over from the horizon. Still dressed in shorts and summer attire, this sudden change was most uncomfortable, but it was merely the symptom of what was shortly to happen.

Flashes of lightning shot through the blackness, followed by a groaning sound that became louder and louder as it advanced towards us. Then a rushing mighty wind swept through the firmament and brought such a fierce deluge of rain that we had to crouch against the onslaught and were drenched to the skin in the space of a minute. It lasted a quarter of an hour and I never want to be in such a rain again. Without an atom of protection, it plunged us into utter misery, and we had to spend the night on the sodden ground and with the water oozing out of our clothes. My precious *Golden Treasury* got a soaking and its limp, creased binding now bears testimony to that wretched night. The only smile I could get out of it was from Ted Knight's remark: 'Another b—— storm like that and they'll have to get the Ark out agin!'

The grandeur of the Palestine hills was worth all the effort of struggling up the steep gradients that rose many hundreds of feet above sea-level. Besides having plenty of natural growth they were terraced out of white rock that helped to form a sparkling picture in the sunlight. Around Latron the country was particularly fertile and resting among the olive-trees I was able 'to sit beneath the bough' and call up the ghost of Omar Khayyám. Up the main Jerusalem road moved an endless procession of troops, guns, and camels, in readiness for the next assault on the Holy City. The temperature fell alarmingly and instead of drinking in our own sweat we now shivered with the cold and would have welcomed the return of winter clothing. Arriving at the picturesque village of Enab a number of hungry children came clamouring for food, and though we could only give them the odds and ends of our own poor rations, it was good to see them munch with a ravenous delight. This was outside the walls of a monastery well-stocked with wine and food for its portly inhabitants. The feeding of the five thousand had happened (according to scriptural teaching) not so far

away, but there seemed no effort to give the parable a modern application. That night, when a number of us were detained to look after the wagons, Captain Wilson introduced himself and our requirements to some of the monks, with the result that we had a splendid meal of bully and black bread, washed down by draughts of ancient vintage.

The remainder of the unit had gone on to Emmaus, where the infantry had taken over the positions captured by the 74th Division, which had been heavily engaged. We saw detachments of infantry coming out of the line, or rather from the mouth of hell, for every man had horror in his eyes and the countenance of a fearful ordeal. There was more evidence of the ordeal, however, at Emmaus, where a fine old Franciscan monastery and convent were being used as a clearing station for the wounded that had been left behind. As the ambulance wagons could not be got over the steep hills there was little hope for the serious cases unless they could be operated on on the spot, and so congested was the place that patients were lying on stretchers on the roadside. But 'Heartbreak House' was at the convent. Situated in an exposed position, it was full of seriously wounded men who occupied the beds in its stately rooms, and I was sent to relieve the orderly who had been left in charge.

I arrived to find a scene of unforgettable horror. Each room was crowded with patients suffering the agonies of terrible wounds, while a Scotch doctor (Captain A. Pirie Watson by name) carried out major operations under improvised conditions. Amputations of legs and arms, the setting of compound fractures of joints, and the removal of bullets and shrapnel was a colossal job for this doctor to perform, but he calmly stuck to his task and had a cheerful word for the patients even while enemy shells were knocking off parts of the build-

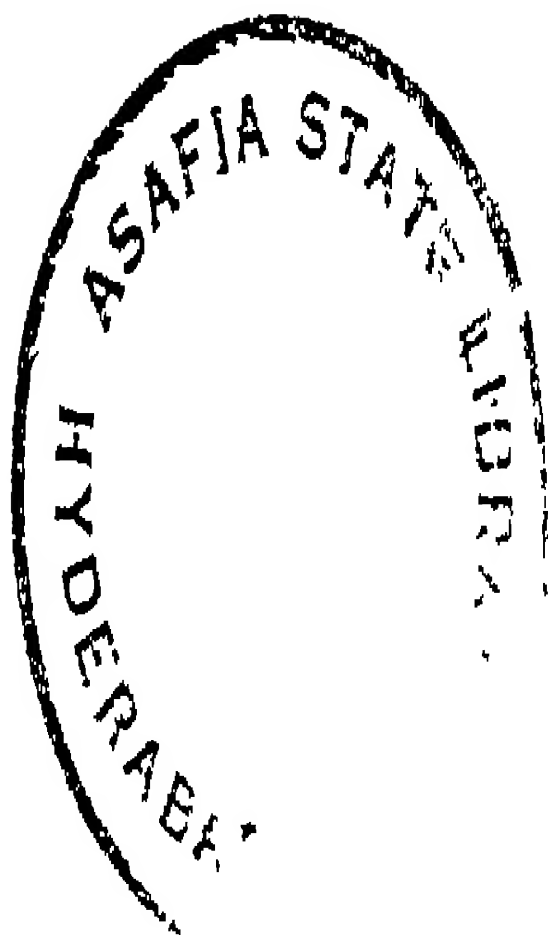
ing. If the sufferers could have been evacuated immediately after the operations it would have been better for them, but as they were brought back into the rooms to be under one another's gaze and to mingle their agonizing cries with heart-rending effect, it was like being in a torture chamber without any power to allay the pain. Of course the operations were just a sheer gamble with death, and many of the lads died a few hours after from shock. One of the most saddening cases was that of a young married man from Newcastle, who was so hopelessly shot in the pelvis that he had to be left gradually to die. During his last moments he lay in my arms crying for his wife and child, and tried to moan out a message for me to take to her. A youth with a leg taken off from the thigh passed away while calling for his mother, and as I held him with one hand my other was being clasped by Beattie, a fine young Scotchman who lay dying in the next bed with a part of his side blown away. But the details are too painful to recall. Only by steeling my nerves to be of service to the sufferers and a comfort to the dying was I saved from being driven frantic. For two days I saw Death's gaunt fingers clutch at mangled men; as life flickered out I drew the blankets over the still faces.

The evacuation of the patients who survived the operations was a difficult process. As not a vehicle could be got over those rugged hills they had to be carried by-hand, a distance of over six miles, to Enab. The hills were formed of ridges of rough stones, which meant lifting the stretchers from one elevation to another, in some parts as high as our heads. The stretcher-bearers struggled up the heights and worked day and night to get the patients to the base hospitals as quickly as possible. My ordeal at the convent had brought on neuralgia and a high temperature, but I was too busy to report sick. The heavy casualties and the constant shelling had a depressing effect on most of us, especially

when one of the shells sailed through the 'bivvy' sheet of one of the cooks, who had been lying under it a few minutes before. The last patient I attended at this place was a Turk, who lay on a stretcher outside the monastery with his right leg amputated from the thigh. A man of tremendous physical strength, he allowed a doctor and myself to dress his raw stump without flinching as he calmly smoked a cigarette. We both marvelled at his fortitude.

The weather was now becoming atrocious, and it is doubtful whether any troops suffered greater hardships than did the 60th Division on those exposed hills. Within a short time we had passed from the gruelling heat of the desert to high mountainous country where the piercing cold and rain brought us to the limit of human endurance. Any old sacking or sandbags were used to tie round our bare knees or to stuff under our scanty summer clothing. Up to this point I had practically done without the rum ration, but I was soon glad to surrender my prejudice in the interests of bodily warmth. The final onslaught in the capture of Jerusalem was to be carried out in the face of all obstacles and the weather was certainly the most formidable to be overcome.

Friday, 7th December, was a day of unutterable misery. A cold driving rain saturated us to the skin and turned all the tracks and roads into sticky quagmires. But we had to be in position for the attack at dawn on the following morning. The infantry on the hills were in a terrible plight, and if it is true that extra rum was rushed up to invigorate them for the attack it can be truly said that Jerusalem was taken on the strength of this stimulating potion. To get the guns into striking position was a Herculean task, for the wheels sunk in the mud and exhausted the strength of both man and beast. Indeed, the indomitable spirit of man is never more tested than when faced by the necessities of war. Lashed by wind and rain and with the ground conditions worsen-







*I found these  
Photographs outside  
Jerusalem in 1918*

IF IDENTIFIED PLEASE  
WRITE TO ME AT THE  
PUBLISHERS

ing every hour, teams of men and horses pulled and struggled at the wheels until they were heaved out of the morass and the guns galloped away for others to take their place. Hardly less difficult was the task of getting the laden camels along the slippery roads. The native drivers were in a pathetic plight, for their only covering was a light garment normally worn in the torrid heat of the desert. Many of them died through exposure, while the misery of the others was a picture worthy of the imagination of a Doré. I was so sick and wretched myself that I relied on spasms of crying to keep up.

The attack, however, was made according to plan, and the Turks were soon in retreat. Jerusalem had been kept immune from gunfire, and when a sergeant of the 19th battalion ventured through the environs of the city on 9th December, he not only found that the enemy had gone, but that the mayor was there waiting to hand over the keys. The story reached us that the sergeant promptly told the mayor that he didn't want the bloody keys, but he could do with a good drink. The official version, of course, was different. To represent the average British soldier as fighting his way through hells of hardship and torment in urgent response to an enthralling desire to capture the Holy City was romantic conceit of the war correspondents. I am reminded of a letter I received from a dear old lady who expressed the hope that the conquerors approached Jerusalem 'with due reverence and awe and holy praises on their lips,' to which I replied that as the language I heard was not likely to have historical permanence, no good purpose would be served in repeating it. The capture of the city of course was the outstanding event of the campaign, but as all objectives meant blood and struggle and the grim blotting-out of life, their sentimental values were chiefly enjoyed by those who did none of the fighting. I was a non-combatant looking after the wounded, and I can recollect few signs of rejoicing among the rank

and file. Like many others on that eventful night I was simply worn out and depressed.

Convoys of wounded had to be taken from Kolonieh to Enab, the stretcher-bearers having performed superhuman tasks in bringing the patients down the precipitous hill-sides. The road to Enab was a narrow nine-mile stretch of inclines and difficult hairpin bends, and was so congested with traffic that the ambulance wagons could only just squeeze their way through. If a camel toppled over in the thick mud or a limber wagon broke down they were instantly hauled off the track to avoid a general hold-up. At one point a caterpillar tractor refused to budge, and I remember Allenby coming along and giving a helping hand in clearing it away. Native camel drivers, whose bare feet were badly lacerated by the stony roads, sat about crying themselves to death in utter misery. Officers would then dash up and kick them into action again. Even our own drivers sat on the horses half asleep, while my own eyes were sore and bloodshot through sheer fatigue. Then an ugly incident happened that unnerved me for the rest of the night. As the wagons were turning a hairpin bend the last one, which I was following, failed to keep to the track and suddenly disappeared with horses and driver into the abyss below. Fortunately the drop was not more than twenty feet and I scrambled down to rescue the two seriously wounded patients that were lying in the vehicle. They were in a heap underneath the stretchers and I pulled them to safety while the horses lay struggling in the darkness. With the help of the driver I then got the patients back on to the road and held up a car that was crunching its way to Jerusalem. The occupants were a general and his staff, but they readily consented to take the two wounded men with them. Both had been shot in the stomach, and in tying the stretchers on to the car they both assured me that they felt no worse for the mishap. That night I prayed for those courageous boys and fervently hoped they would recover

from that fearful ordeal. May these words bring some confirmatory message from the survivors of those years.

'In such a night as this,' the thrills of war came to the few and not to the many. And the few were certainly the staff officers who hastened by in comfortable cars to make triumphal entry into the city, the capture of which had meant so much hardship, suffering, and loss of life. Protected from the atrocious weather and foulness of the roads, and with good sleep and dinners to keep up a roseate complexion, these well-paid, well-secured officers would receive the praises and promotions of Whitehall while the enduring many would merely have the recognition of cold arithmetic. I am now trying to think how many of the brass hats have since declaimed against the adventure and so-called virtues of war.

Up to the present the 2/5th had been fortunate in the matter of casualties. In the terrific fighting at Nebi Samwil (where Richard Cœur de Lion had once turned his face away from Jerusalem), young Emmett had been killed by a bullet in the stomach and others had died from disease. But in the heavy shelling of the ambulance at Sheria and at Kubeibeh most of us had the luck to escape and find ourselves minus only a few camels. Hence the unit was able to march into Jerusalem on 13th December pretty well complete. It was an exciting day, for in addition to having a special polish up, we had the prospect of relief from the arduous months of campaigning, during which time we had lost all contact with social life. And though there were no palm leaves to bestrew our path we marched in as conquering heroes to the joyous reception of excited children, who pranced round us like caged birds enjoying once again the ecstasy of freedom. In their pale little faces and glassy eyes the tyranny of the Turk had set its mark, and like them I was thrilled to know that the hour of deliverance had come. And the fresh sight of women was no less

elevating. If youth could faithfully confess from his innermost heart what deprivation hurts him most and what aching void is most distressing in the unnatural conditions of military service, I think he would instantly say that it was that arising from the suspension of the normal association of woman. Over those monotonous deserts week in and week out, with only the uncouth forces of masculine energy to awaken emotions and appeal to the finer sentiments the need of feminine grace was never more urgent. To me it was mental agony, and if the women of Jerusalem did no more than break that spell, I, like thousands of other young men, was grateful for such release.

Those who fought under General Allenby will not easily forget the kind of Jerusalem it was they entered. So far from being 'golden' and 'with milk and honey blest,' it was the dullest and most anaemic place imaginable. The Turks had bled it like a hoard of parasites, leaving the people weak and practically destitute. Disease, famine, fear, and neglect haunted the streets like ghostly spectres, and one wept with the pity of a Saladin for the human misery everywhere in evidence. On the Jews and the European inhabitants especially had the whip of oppression fallen, for one could read in their white and withered faces the agony they endured. Few eyes kindled with a ray of hope. From wretched, insanitary, squalid houses men, women, and children emerged in clothes grotesquely old and worn, and with all the air and aspect of disappointment. Those with business initiative and the necessary capital turned their houses and any sheltered hovels into cafés and little shops and commenced trading with the troops. Every sort of cooking device to make pastries of uniform ingredients attractive to the eye was here employed, and fig roll was a dainty that became very popular. And the most interesting vendors were the children. Tiny tots, whose precocity was simply amazing, carried out transactions with the astuteness of keen business elders

and knew more about the values of money than the soldiers themselves. Education was at a standstill, though the knowledge and intelligence of some of the Jewish children were most extraordinary. A fourteen-year old shoeblack who did homage outside my billet could speak six languages, and two or three fluently. The youthful daughters of a Jewish journalist who had opened up a café were also good linguists and could ably discourse on erudite subjects. In fact, talent seemed to be everywhere held in bondage. Given a full outlet of expression this intellectual reserve could have made Jerusalem one of the flourishing cities under the sun. As it was, it represented a shambles of misrule, inequalities, and neglect. The only water supply was from old-fashioned cisterns that proved to be cesspools of malaria. The sanitary arrangements were three hundred years old. The most deplorable poverty was linked to the ostentation of wealth. Every thoroughfare had its hoard of blind and crippled beggars all moaning the same monotonous plea for help. Children were taught various devices for attracting the sympathy of the passers-by. It was a city of tragic contradictions. While palatial hospitals existed to scoop up the human wreckage created by a rotten social system, religious sects vied with each other in scooping up the wealth and in making their churches emporiums of priceless treasure. Survival of the fittest inexorably mocked at charity, and this strange mixture of people seemed to be divided into castes and creeds that maintained a rigid kind of social isolation.

The occupation of the British, therefore, involved no small responsibility. To supply the omissions of the Turks and to free the people from a long-standing sense of oppression were tasks which, to the honour of the military authorities, were executed without delay. The children were examined, the sources of disease discovered, and what the city had never before enjoyed, namely, a pure water supply, was brought in by the

British engineers within a few months of their arrival. Thus the people soon showed signs of expansion. The pall of the past was being shaken off; a fresh spirit of trust and confidence began to generate; eyes grew brighter and less sad; music and laughter revived, and, among the young people especially, the dawn of a new Jerusalem had become a conscious fact.

The Arabs occupied the walled-in old section of the city, where the life showed little variation from that of Biblical times. In the ancient bazaars multitudes of natives babbled and bartered under the picturesque fez and the smell of antiquity pervaded the narrow thoroughfares. Out in the Temple Square the Mosque of Omar flaunted its rich mosaics and round the Wailing Wall sounded the lamentations that had been going on for centuries. Seven rival sects worshipped in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, and British sentries were posted at the door to keep the peace. An inscribed plaque marked the spot where Christ was scourged in the Via Dolorosa and inside the church a massive solid gold cross commemorated the place where He was supposed to have been crucified.

One evening I strolled up the Mount of Olives and entered the Garden of Gethsemane. The keeper was attending the flowers as if war and strife never existed, and he was more keen to point out the tree that marked the scene of Christ's agony than to distress his mind with the suffering of the world. I envied his simple philosophy. Then I strolled into an open door of the Russian church, whose eight gilded domes and jasmined walls were a conspicuous feature for miles around. The place was deserted except for an elderly woman caretaker living in the crypt, where she had remained practically half starved and in fear of the Turks. In broken English she told me of the privations the people had suffered and of the brutality of the Turkish soldiers. And as if an added curse had been put on the city a locust plague had so ravaged the food supplies that seeds

had to be stored in the ground to avoid famine. I took her some of my own rations during the few days I was in Jerusalem, when she cried with gratitude on each visit. Near by, the Tower of Ascension gave a commanding view of the surrounding country and of the new Turkish positions a few miles away. Being in the neutral zone it was not supposed to be used for military purposes, but no time was lost in utilizing it as an observation post by artillery officers. Down below was the Golden Gate of the city, walled up until the Day of Judgment, so it was said, when we shall all pass through to walk on the edge of a flaming sword stretched across the Kedron Valley, wherein will fall the wicked to eternal damnation, while the good will pass into perpetual happiness on the other side. I once heard a wag say that a Scotchman had walled up the gate because he had lost sixpence in the foundations.

The capture of Jerusalem brought little or no lull in the fighting. As the enemy had established a line within a few miles of the city the 60th Division moved on to hold positions in the neighbourhood of Tel-el-Ful. The 2/5th fixed up an advanced dressing station behind a great white rock and here I spent some of the most miserable days of the whole campaign. After a short fine spell the weather again became intolerably wretched, the cold, driving rain soaking us to the skin and forcing us to lie on a saturated ground. Our hope had been to spend Christmas in Jerusalem, but with this hope dashed to the ground and our spirits lowered by the awful conditions it was a time for depression and despair.

On Christmas Eve, when our people at home were preparing to celebrate the season of goodwill on the morrow, the troops in Palestine were preparing for one of the bloodiest battles of the campaign, nearly within sound of the bells of Bethlehem. The Turks (commanded throughout, by the way, by a German general) had staged a terrific counter-attack for Christmas Day, and men who had marched into Jerusalem for a few days



warmth and comfort were soon marched out again to the exposure of the hills. The entry in my diary for that Christmas Day contains the following:

'Torrential rain. Porridge and bully for breakfast. Saw people going to St George's Cathedral to hear about peace on earth and goodwill towards men while bayonets are fixed ready for action. Went up to line at dusk to collect wounded. Pitiful plight of infantry, soaked to the skin and looking half dead from exposure. Hope Lloyd George and Churchill enjoy their turkey dinner. Ghastly journey to Jerusalem with wounded. Every one dejected and I suppose terribly homesick. Hospital at least warm, but out on the hills . . .' A few days later I was sent to the village of Bireh to attend to a number of natives who had been wounded by the recent shelling, and the only way to get into the little mud hovels was by wading through pools of blood that had collected outside the doors. No patient could be touched until I had first accepted an offering of dates as a token of my goodwill, and when I tried to explain to a husband that two of his wives would have to go to hospital for the extraction of shrapnel he thought they were going to be kidnapped and excitedly offered me more dates as the ransom. The women were grief-stricken at parting from their husband, but on the high road to the hospital they became as buoyant as children released from the schoolroom.

The New Year was ushered in by fierce battles and plenty of heartbreak. 'Ring out the old; ring in the new' might have suited Lord Lansdowne and millions more, but the blood-lust had got too great a hold on the powerful and the prosperous to think of talking of peace. The Turks showed their new year spirit by stripping naked the dead bodies of Londoners before we could reach them and by using the stolen uniforms to protect themselves from the weather. Jack Harvey had the luck

to be sent to Port Said with malaria and the Roosters Concert Party came along to cheer us up. One afternoon I met the eyes of a young infantryman in a Jerusalem street. We stopped, looking at one another.

'Ah, Billington, of the Old Meeting Church days. Hardly knew you in a uniform, and in the 22nd battalion, eh? Wonder we haven't met before.'

'I only arrived last week. Sent out with a draft of other Brums. Going up to the line to-morrow.'

His young face looked rather apprehensive.

'No Bach and billiards up there,' I said with a laugh, remembering the happy hours we had at Mr Cross's house. 'Best of luck, Billington, and—shall we fix Dover for the next meeting?'

'Under Big Ben at Brum,' was his parting sally.

Within three days of this chance meeting Billington was lying dead on the hills, with a bullet in his belly.

Later on I was sent to join the immobile section at Enab for a short time, where Sharrier, an Egyptian doctor, was in control. Most of his time was spent in grousing against the British authorities and in writing epistles of protest which he recited with the gusto of a Shakespearian actor. Happily the weather began to get warmer and I was able to spend many a pleasant hour under the olive-trees and share the elfin life of the village children among the expanding beauties of nature. It was a joyous spectacle to see them race down the grass slope after the rolling orange and to hear them babbling in Arabic as they pressed me for another game. But I had to be careful against becoming too friendly as the superstitious parents associated strangers with the curse of the Evil Eye. On one occasion when I tried to make a fond mother understand my appreciation of a fine babe she was holding she ran into the house screaming with fright. Had her husband been about, it might have been a choice between my life and a curse on the child. But these happy interludes with the children occurred between the gruesome work of cleaning out

the gangrenous wounds of camel drivers who had borne the brunt of hardship and neglect in the fighting round Jerusalem. Sharrier was a callous doctor in dealing with these patients and often roused me to protest against his harsh methods. Then when evening came I sought the isolation of a disused hut at the bottom of a garden and revelled in poetic creations by candlelight as a solace to my distraught mind. And as the Palgrave's *Treasury* became more battered so it became more of a blessing.

The 60th were now operating towards Jericho, which lies in the Jordan valley about sixteen miles from Jerusalem. As the valley descends to eleven hundred feet below sea-level, it becomes one of the hottest spots in the world. Precipitous hills and exposed stretches of barren country made it an easy target for enemy bombers, who soon became unpleasantly active. Arriving at our main dressing station a few hours after it had been attacked, I found a state of agitation among the men. The stench of dead camels was awful. Under cover of darkness the natives of Jericho were being evacuated out of the danger zone and as the weather was cold and rainy they had a most distressing time. Jaunted along on camels a mother and son died *en route*. Children cried themselves into exhaustion and when I eventually lifted them down it was difficult to tell whether they were dead or alive. Never was I more angered by the ruthlessness of war than when I saw the plight of refugee children. Snatched up from sleep to face the rigours of a long night journey in treacherous weather, they were more of the kingdom of hell than children of the kingdom of heaven. If mothers could only see the Herod in every military uniform!

If the walls of Jericho were as fragile in Biblical times as we found them it would not require many blasts of the trumpet to blow them over. And the ambiguous phrase, 'Go to Jericho,' had a more comprehensive meaning when I saw the mass of dirty little hovels and

the malarial-infested streets which had to be given a wide berth. In a short time it was like 'the deserted village,' on which no airman would even waste a bomb.

Resting one night against the ruins of the Good Samaritan Inn on the Jericho-Jerusalem road I was given a pass for a week's leave to Cairo, which gave me a shock, for this was the first break of any description I had had since leaving England. The next day I was jumping lorries and travelling in cattle-trucks, and eventually reached Cairo as a comparatively free man. My first reaction was to sit on the bed at the Y.M.C.A. hostel and cry out the nervous tension of two years' continuous campaign. In the mirror I looked considerably aged and very much thinner, but I marvelled at the same time how my health had kept up. Then I strolled out into the blazing sunshine and among the cosmopolitan life of the city. The only signs of a war were the number of brass hats lolling back in comfortable Daimlers or expanding round the whisky tables at the portals of Shepherd's Hotel. Jolly old generals who had blundered sufficiently to be rewarded with cushy jobs at the base were thoroughly entrenched in this luxurious establishment, and as a few score were doddering about Cairo at this time they had good cause to thank a lavish and lenient Government for the way their 'services' had been recognized. At night they danced and drank in the glitter of stately rooms while the lads up in Palestine were having their faces smashed in for a shilling a day. I turned away from the maddening scene to the calm and beauty of the Ezbekia Gardens where European children played under the spreading banyan-trees and restored some joyous feeling to my war-sick heart. To one less obsessed by moral scruples the brothel and the women of the street gave every opportunity for sexual diversion. Young touts sidled up to invite me to 'jig-a-jig with nice lady' and put accommodating cards in my hand. In the *wassas* (streets given up entirely to professional prostitution),

the women sat outside their doors in all states of nudity offering competitive terms to passers-by and in some cases exposing the bed through the open window. The younger women were more audacious and had no shame in appearing completely naked and in trying to drag the soldiers into their rooms. And when the drinking booths were filled at night with the voluptuous frenzy of intoxicated natives who caterwauled and carried on like brainless animals, these girls could be seen dancing the *cancan* with every suggestion of sex degeneration. To safeguard the health of men visiting the brothels a prophylactic was now given out to all troops going on leave, but owing to the widespread nature of prostitution it was impossible to prevent the contraction of a great amount of venereal disease. In visiting one of the large canvas hospitals for these cases I talked to many normally clean-living young men who were half demented with syphilis and the stigma it placed upon them. Many committed suicide while others were prevented from escaping by an armed guard. Among them were married men who had not seen home since the commencement of the war, and they spoke bitterly of the strain that had been put on their moral principles. The agitation at home against the practice of handing prophylactics to the troops would have been better directed had it compelled the authorities to have been more generous in the granting of home leave from the Middle East, for it was simply futile to expect continuous abstinence from sex-starved men who were enduring the risks of war year in and year out without a break.

But Cairo had more attractions to offer than the brothels. I went to the pyramids on a donkey and after visiting the tomb of King Cheops in the inner chamber, I was perched on a camel to have my photograph taken before the historic pile. Then I walked the mosques in bare feet and spent hours in the wonderful bazaars dreaming of the treasures I would like to have, and of the romance I would like to enjoy. Youth had run its course

in sackcloth and ashes and under those skies I saw the panorama of the 'might-have-beens' and longed for spiritual escape into a fuller existence. Vain dreams. The *via purgativa* was beckoning me back and I was soon travelling again over the Sinai desert.

Returning to the loathsome Jordan valley I found the division making a desperate effort to effect a crossing over the ancient river. The first battle, however, was against the mosquitoes, for with the return of the warm weather and the humid atmosphere of the place, these pests attacked us in full force. And carrying a malignant germ, their victims could be well and dead in the space of a day. Not even the Samsons of our colonial troops could withstand the infection, and hundreds of splendid-looking men passed out like the snuff of a candle. But strange was the fate that could lay one man low with the disease while another with many more bites could get through unharmed. In my own experience I used to wake up with my face hardly recognizable through the swellings, but from all the countless bites I received I was destined to emerge with no trace of malaria.

The first crossing of the Jordan was carried out by a party of the 19th London Battalion who courageously swam across with ropes while under machine-gun fire. Some of the men were shot while in the water but the majority managed to fix up a pontoon bridge which enabled us to cross and shelter among the dunes. Through the darkness of the night a long procession of men and animals stealthily congregated on the Turkish side of the river and in a short time we were following up the infantry in their attack on enemy positions in front of the hills of Moab.

The comradeship of war is an emergency upsurge of goodwill to offset the dehumanizing conditions that are always in conflict with one's better self. And never

was the spirit more acceptable than when I returned from Cairo to the blood and bombs and the pale weariness of overwrought men. Crouching among the brush-wood with Thompson as the machine-gun bullets whizzed by, I momentarily thought of Cairo lights and the comfortable bed, of a lovely Italian child in the Ezbekia Gardens, and of a happy family sitting at dinner before an open window; thoughts that would have turned me crazy, had they not been equalled by Harry's hearty handclasp and Fulcher's friendly eyes and Thompson's anxious voice telling me to take better cover. These were the gestures that had an eternal ring about them—something that throbbed on long after bullets had pinged their way into the earth or crashed into a fellow's brain. Safety of oneself was an instinctive impulse in that danger zone, but when the call for 'stretcher-bearers' went up we rushed defiantly into the open and carried the wounded to the main dressing station at Nimrim with thoughts centred on the other man.

The Turks were particularly busy around this area and it seemed a miracle that any of us could get through unscathed. My narrowest escape was when a shell burst a few yards from a spot where I was sitting and a lump of hot casing crashed into the earth just a couple of inches above my head. The next day it was a relief for the enemy to be driven back into the hills beyond Es Salt, where fierce fighting was to take place. But the heavy rains had so made quagmires of the roads that sufficient guns could not be got up in support of the advancing infantry. Heavy casualties resulted and soon a general retirement back over the Jordan was ordered. This was the first sign of defeat the division had encountered and it was a gloomy business falling back on to old positions. To add to the difficulties, convoys of sick native refugees of Es Salt had to be dealt with, for they arrived on camels in a deplorable state; most of them wet through to the skin and half dead with typhus fever. As all the ambulances were

in use we had to lay them on the slope of a hill and feed them with the remnants of our food until we could borrow some wagons from the A.S.C. to take them over the Jordan. And this was accomplished when the division was working under extreme pressure against time and under appalling weather conditions. To have left these sick people to the tyranny of the Turks (who had already raided the hospitals at Es Salt and Ammon) would have been excusable by most armies in hasty retirement, but by a tremendous effort every patient was taken safely over the river and sent to Jerusalem the next day. This humane gesture of the army authorities was worthy of the highest admiration, for it upheld the tradition of the British soldier as never being deliberately cruel to civil populations. That was my experience during the whole of the war.

We then moved with the 180th brigade to Talat-ed-Dumm, where we enjoyed a few days of well-earned rest. Bands played, the food improved, and the Roosters and Barnstormers concert parties came to revive song and laughter in the camps. And to show that our cultural spirit was not subdued we produced scenes from Shakespeare, of which I sent voluminous reports to the *Egyptian Gazette*. This respite was broken into, however, by a further move towards Jerusalem, when we pitched camp on the site where Titus was supposed to have set his tents. But in the meantime the Turks were augmenting troops across the Jordan and the 60th were soon ordered to 'go to Jericho,' which was a more compassionate way of saying 'Go to hell.'

We returned to the Jordan valley towards the end of April, the infantry having to recapture the positions they had previously held. Resting on the banks of the Jordan as the 19th battalion was going into action, I watched the succession of pale young faces pass like dream-shadows into the night and on towards the rattle of enemy machine-guns that heralded their approach. Before dawn they were back in the inferno round the



foothills and for the next two days we had a most hectic time in collecting the wounded. Putting up a formidable resistance, the Turks literally peppered the ground with bullets and shrapnel and sent over planes that machine-gunned us within a hundred feet of the ground. A second retirement was ordered, and by the opening of May the division was on the way to Ramallah to enjoy its first official rest.

Human nature is very resilient to surroundings. Away from the scene of conflict and the ever-present shadow of death our spirits emerged as from a dark hole to radiate in the companionship of sport and conversation, in the opportunities to write letters and to read a book and to take evening strolls under the stars. Words can never fully describe the emotional reactions of men suddenly withdrawn from the horrors and hardships of the battle-field. Varying with the temperament of the individual soldier I can only particularize my own experience by saying that it was like being born again into a cleaner consciousness wherein love, hope, and joy had shaken off the past. The past indeed. No, I will not recapitulate the events I have brought you through. I will simply do what I did then, namely, marvel at the good luck that hung round me like a guardian angel and heave a sigh for the unfortunate lads to whom the war was a calvary of suffering and disease, and often death.

Then fell the thunderbolt. While officers and men were enjoying the merry-go-round of 'rest' in donkey-racing, football matches, and theatrical performances, news came that owing to the urgent requirements of the Western Front, the 60th Division was to be broken up and that all A.I. men would have to join the combatant service. With my health still unimpaired I knew that I should be classed among the fit, and still having an abhorrence of killing I was faced with a most difficult

problem. Some of the men instantly put in for commissions but I was too much on the side of the rank and file to seek the freemasonry of officialdom. I debated with Harry as to whether I should now go all out as a conscientious objector, but realizing how untenable the position was after my serving in a Field Ambulance, I eventually decided to join the air service as an observer with the hope that I would crash on my first flight and be done with the fighting for good. Captain Leslie, who recommended my application with glowing pride, little thought what dark scheme was hatching in my mind.

The separation of close comrades who had shared the vicissitudes of active campaigning on three war fronts, who had hungered and suffered together under common dangers and through an intimate understanding of one another's feelings had become more like a family of brothers, was regarded by the majority of the 2/5th as something of a tragedy. My diary records:

*May 19. DEMOLITION SUNDAY.* First draft leaves for the base after affecting farewells. The 'Swann Song' of three years' comradeship. Passing of the 'erbs, including the incomparable Harry to the 22nd bat.; an unforgettable stronghold of sterling manhood. Went to Whit. service for consolation but felt little of the Pentecostal Flame.

One morning we paraded on the hill-side at Ain-Arik to hear General Shea give a parting message to the Ambulance. It was as follows:

Colonel Lunn, officers, N.C.O.'s, and men of the 2/5th London Field Ambulance:

The War has become so great, and all the various circumstances connected therewith so inevitably pressing that we have taught ourselves to prepare for startling changes that are taking place, and to obey orders. Of course this sounds very philosophical to most of us, but, as you know, it is not an easy matter to carry it out in actual practice.

Within a few days the 2/5th London Field Ambulance will

be finished, but before carrying out the order I have come to remind you of one or two things I would have you remember before you disband. In addition to the fine fighting qualities of the old '60th,' nothing has shown to me the superiority of the division above others I have had the honour to command, more than the splendid spirit with which the medical units have assisted. You have never failed your comrades of the infantry and your unit especially do I single out in this and other respects. You have never shrunk from danger nor faltered in face of the most rigid hardship, which at times seemed almost inhuman to bear, while I know from personal intimacy of the courage and bravery you have invariably displayed.

About your efficiency as a medical unit I say nothing, as in the light of your undoubted merit in the field one can almost be pardoned for taking it for granted; but I do wish to emphasize the magnificent spirit and prompt willingness which characterized all your work. If each of you live to the age of a hundred years you will be able to look back upon a record and reputation of which you will be justly proud and which you will take with you wherever you go.

I cannot say what exactly is going to happen to those of you who will shortly be leaving, but, as far as I know, many of you may possibly be drafted to France as reinforcements to medical units, while the remainder will have the opportunity of volunteering for the infantry. It will give me great pleasure to receive back into the division any who train for the infantry, and I have already asked for those who do volunteer.

If, after the War, any of you should happen to meet me in the street, or in any other place whatsoever, I shall be glad—I shall be grateful to you if you will recognize me, and come and shake me by the hand. You have my heartfelt thanks for all that you have done.

Good luck. Bless you all.

A high tribute to our work was also paid by Colonel Lunn, whose splendid leadership was something to hold in memory. The eligibles for the fresh dispersement were then sent to Kantara and those of us who made the journey felt the 'sadness of farewell' more keenly than could be expressed. 'Reunion in Blighty' was every one's hopeful wish.

I have already had some harsh things to say about the base at Kantara, but only unprintable language would convey my feelings on my second stay in this hellish place. Had we been protesting conscripts without an atom of service to our credit, the badgering and bullying treatment we received from 'Colonel Blimp and Co.' could not have been excelled. Day after day there were senseless kit inspections in the scorching sun, full-pack parades for the benefit of bored officers, and a round of annoying duties that goaded the men into minor riots. And to add to the discontent the food rationing was a scandal. Most of our money went into the tills of the canteen and the Y.M.C.A., for porridge and dry bread were hardly sufficient for the drain on our energies. Never had the men been more bitter about the disparity of treatment than they were at this time. While the officers (and how many of the 'socially fortified' brass hats had even seen a front-line trench?) revelled in luxury and flaunted their power and privileges like medieval barons over serfs, the rank and file were crushed under a despotic rule and made to become practically self-supporting as a tribute to the record of sacrifice they had already achieved. Hence there was a deadly hatred of the officer class and a large barbed-wire enclosure, known as the 'Bird Cage,' was required to intern the insubordinate. The arid wastes of sand around Kantara aptly symbolized the type of 'goodwill' that existed between officers and men.

A day's leave to Port Said was a necessary respite to weeks of exasperating military tyranny. I had almost reached the point of plunging recklessly into every evil available in this cosmopolitan centre, but my frayed moral sense revived on the journey and I was content to have a good English dinner in Sam's Café and to admire the picturesque statue of de Lesseps before mingling with the kaleidoscopic life of the streets. Eventually, I came to a small thoroughfare that was completely filled by a huge marquee and a lavish display of hanging carpets

and coloured festoonery. Hosts of children were dancing about and at the entrance to the marquee sat two rows of bandsmen who sprang from their chairs to blare out a fanfare of welcome to every celebrity who passed between them. From the gay attire of the guests an Egyptian wedding was obviously being celebrated, and after the mayor and corporation had passed in I was agreeably surprised to see a steward beckoning me to come forward and enter the hymeneal sanctuary. Up jumped the band at my approach and gave me the only general salute I am ever likely to have. Inside the marquee I was pounced upon by a host of waiters carrying dainty cups of coffee and highly perfumed Turkish cigarettes, which seemed to excite the visitors to spirited conversation and fits of uncontrollable laughter. All the men wore fez but the younger preferred Bond Street suits to the flowing robes of the elder brethren, and looked as if they treated the affair as a huge joke. Then one of them explained that though it was not customary for the bride to share the nuptial rejoicings she was honoured by the marquee being stuck in front of her home so that she could hear the band from the shuttered seclusion of her private room. I was trying to grasp this concession to Western ideas when a party of native bagpipers enlivened the atmosphere and forced me to meditate on the universality of the Scot. Having reached Bond Street, I asked my host whether he would sartorially cross the border to wear the kilt. He replied that there was a limit to Oriental imprudence. He even spoke with an English accent.

I returned to the life of Kantara in a state of depression. The few remaining comrades of the 2/5th had left for different appointments and denuded the camp of intimate friends. Under the designation of 'Details' no badges could be worn and rifles were put in our hands with utter disregard of personal scruples. In practising my first shots I knew that I could no more aim the bullet at a man than I could overcome a natural weakness to

close the wrong eye, with the result that my application to join the Royal Air Force was passed through and I was sent to Abu Qir to commence training.

Now to laugh at army methods instead of cursing them was something novel in my experience. But here, at Abu Qir, I was able to laugh uproariously, for I had unwittingly jumped the gulf between the plebeian rank and the commissioned gentleman. As a cadet (though I had no intention of becoming an officer), my qualities and character rushed up in military value, and when the burly sergeant on parade started to call me 'Mr So-and-so' in the most polite terms, I began to wonder whether I was still in the army or in a training centre for the Bank of England. And to sit at table to five-course dinners and be waited on by young men who called me 'sir,' was such a sudden turnover from years of 'pigging' it round the dixie that I wanted to rush back to Kantara and tell others about this short cut from Bermondsey to Belgravia. It was both grotesque and funny. Just because I had chosen a job that needed some skill and the exercise of brain power, I was treated as vastly superior to those brave youngsters of the London infantry whom I had seen plunge into battle and endure all the worst hardships of trench and desert warfare. With my restored individuality rose my pay, but also rose a private determination to return to the ranks. For six weeks I attended lectures and learned the technicalities of flying while in search of a way of escape. It came in the final tests of physical efficiency, when I was conveniently certified unsuitable to be trusted to share a plane. So I ceased to be a gentleman forthwith and was sent back to the commoners of Kantara for more propitious disposal.

The last phase of the Palestine campaign was now about to commence by a large-scale attack on Turkish positions in the hilly country round Nablus. Fortunately for my peace of mind I was reinstated in the R.A.M.C.

and sent to assist at the casualty clearing station at Ludd. The intense summer heat had revived the scourge of malaria with a vengeance and I was soon busy again with the thermometer and in helping to carry out heavy colonial victims to the mortuary. The mosquito was still a more deadly enemy than the Turk, which led to a serious congestion of the hospital when the wounded arrived. Owing to inadequate transport, patients were put under trees and denied the urgent treatment of which they were in need, while the old scandal of reserving beds for officers jeopardized the life of many a private.

The limit of patience was reached, however, when I was called upon to look after an officer who was brought in suffering from D.T. His job had been to supervise Egyptian labour in the reconstruction of the railway, and he had so saturated himself with whisky that he was put in a separate tent, a raving maniac. For three days and nights he never closed his eyes and poured out a cataract of talk that did little credit to the King's English. His blasphemy was like the colour of his hands, which had been rendered black and blue through punching the natives—an achievement of which he was proud. Then he gave a detailed account of how he and another officer had killed a native by battering his head with a chunk of wood, and actually jumped out of bed to rehearse the proceedings. At night he insisted on walking the grounds to soliloquize the stars, and being a much heftier fellow than myself, I discreetly avoided another murder by acting as a humble escort. When the violent phase set in he struggled to get a razor from his kit and gave me a thump on the nose as a mild alternative. Calling in Jones, who shared my duties, we had a terrific struggle before we could subdue the monster and tie him down in bed until the frenzy had cooled off. Then, thoroughly exhausted, he snored for thirty-six hours without a break, during which time I could cheerfully have strangled him. He had claimed the constant attention of two orderlies during the busiest

days of the hospital, and heaven knows how many sick and wounded patients suffered neglect in consequence. Sleep was impossible during his nightly ravings, which were a serious menace to men fighting for their lives. He awoke like a stupid animal without sense or sensibility, and might easily have come out of a wild jungle with those discoloured hands. I thought of the ennobling claims of the war-mongers.

Towards the end of October 1918. I returned to Kantara and was there when the Armistice was declared the following month. At home there was wild rejoicing and music and laughter; at Kantara a wild outburst of pent-up anger against ruthless conditions—in fact an insurrection of the rank and file that set the officers quaking with fright. The canteens were raided wholesale and the piano of a sergeants' mess was pitched into the Suez Canal. Colonels, who the day before had men under their feet, were hauled from their pedestals to hear demands which they were glad to carry out. Only official dossiers can tell all (and probably not all) that happened, but suffice it to say that the seething discontent at this monstrous Base found full expression on that eventful day. You will find no mention of it in official history books.

What sense of deliverance could ever exceed that which followed the news 'The War has finished'? The sudden silence of the battle-field, the sheathing of bayonets, the rolling up of stretchers, the finish of fractured limbs and blood-soaked bandages, and the lowering of shattered bodies into simple graves—in short, the sudden cessation of years of methodical human slaughter was too significant to be grasped, and one had either to have a jolly good cry or go demented for a time with emotional excitement.

It would have been an ideal Armistice if we could have packed up and returned home by the next boat.



But the authorities had to face realities, and as the most ominous reality was that the temper of the troops was in accord with social unrest, demobilization in piecemeal fashion was the safe course to pursue. The fortunes of the *nouveau riche* had not been made on the battle-field, and the men who had borne the brunt of the war both in health and all-round sacrifice were now anxious to put in their claims for services rendered. The patriotism shown in giving up a job in 1914 carried no guarantee that an equal patriotism would offer it back in 1918, for the commercial 'digging-in' while the going was good had well fortified the positions against the ex-soldier. Women had shown their capacity for stepping into masculine shoes and, as their economic independence had become more valid by the destruction of the nation's manhood, they were not easily driven out. The feminine sway over the sentimental stay-at-homes had also to be considered, for the flattering contact with pretty typists and secretaries was not open to rapid displacement by war-experienced men. Unless there was a job actually awaiting the returned soldier he had to share in the fight on the commercial and industrial battle-field.

In the Middle East demobilization was conveniently delayed by the uprising of the Egyptian natives. As the Allies had enlisted support by declaring the right of self-determination of the smaller nations, the Egyptians had taken them at their word and began pressing their claims in revolt. This so roused the martial indignation of Mr Winston Churchill that he strongly advised some overtime work for the troops in Palestine, whom he imagined had become so thrilled with warfare that the quelling of riots would be a welcome epilogue to the programme of the last four years. Unfortunately he was not there to get the reception he deserved. The prospect of being detained out there for an indefinite period and falling behind in the struggle for reinstatement in civil life was such a galling imposition on the patience of the men that the natives were soon able to

take lessons in revolt from the rank and file of the British Army. At home a hush-hush policy was adopted by the authorities and for a full account of the rebellion one would have to have access to official documents in the archives of Whitehall. The only newspaper, to my knowledge, to publish anything about the affair, was the *Daily Herald* of 4th June 1919, which gave the following account:

## BRITISH SOVIETS IN EGYPT

### SOLDIERS' COUNCILS FORMED TO ENFORCE DEMOBILIZATION

In the House of Commons the following question was put down by Mr William Lunn, for the responsible minister to answer.

Whether he was aware that Soldiers' Councils had been instituted among the troops in Egypt; that at Kantara such bodies decided what guards and fatigues are necessary; that the Ordnance Corps at Cairo struck on 12th May and an ammunition dump was fired that evening; and if he was aware that a mass meeting of the troops was held on 13th May in Cairo to protest against the compulsory retention of men who volunteered for military service and that a general strike of the men serving in Egypt is threatened, and if he would do his utmost to allay the unrest by speeding up demobilization.

A spontaneous movement of unrest manifested itself throughout the Egyptian Expeditionary Force simultaneously with the expiration of six months after the Armistice.

At Kantara a Central Delegation was formed of two members of each Administrative Unit which proceeded to work on constitutional lines.

Resolutions of protest were sent to each commanding officer, requesting a favourable reply by 11 a.m., Sunday, 11th May.

A mass meeting was held in Kantara Theatre on Sunday 11th May, to receive and consider reports, when commanding officers sat in the body of the hall. Two thousand five hundred men crowded in to overflowing.

Four resolutions demanding swift demobilization were unanimously carried.

A circular memo. issued by G.H.Q. on 15th May 1919 contains the following statement:

'I am arranging to enlist the services of the press in England particularly with a view to undeceiving the public that a large number of men are remaining out here voluntarily—an incorrect statement which is unsettling the men by placing them in a false position, both towards previous employers and towards their wives and families.'

In the *Daily Herald* issue of 9th June 1919, appeared the following news item:

Those who come from Egypt state that the position there is acute as regards the attitude of the men awaiting demobilization. Protest meetings in the streets and actual refusal to do duty were said to be frequent and growing.

The men's case is that while there was fighting to be done they did not ask to be released, but now there is no good reason for their retention and if the Government does not keep its word voluntarily it must be made to.

This rather naïve account of rebellious soldiers 'working on constitutional lines' scarcely gets beyond the fringe of a very serious uprising. The Higher Command was practically repudiated for weeks on end and the men dictated to generals what had to be done. Supplicatory letters signed by the G.O.C. were posted up to try and restore the patience of the insurgents, and the ugly incidents that happened will never be divulged by the official historian. It was a scandal that men who had faithfully served the country from the beginning of the war, and had faced the risks of disease and death year in and year out without seeing their homes, should be compulsorily detained and subjected to the lie that they were remaining from their own free choice. How many jobs were lost and families wrecked by such duplicity are among the unrecorded statistics of war's grim aftermath.

Having neither home nor employment to which to return there was no possible chance of my early demo-

bilization. I was attached to the 3rd. East Anglian Field Ambulance and sent to Sidi Bish, outside Alexandria, where the native rioting was especially violent. Army life had lost its zest for every one and as all were disgruntled at the enforced retention there was no true spirit of comradeship to keep one cheerful. One day an intruder skirmished through the camp in the form of a little black dog with brown eyes and a long tail that whisked against my legs as a token of friendly greeting. Obviously a waif and stray, it looked up with such pleading eyes that I adopted it there and then and made a little home for it at the side of the tent. For many weeks Jock was my constant companion and he came to nestle in my arms at night. Egypt was no place for little Jock, for the sand and sun made his eyes rheumy and I had to bathe them every morning before he could see. Having an incurable desire to follow me on parade, he whined out protests against being tied to the tent and gave me a gushing welcome when I returned to play hide-and-seek with him among the dunes or to plead on his behalf at the cookhouse door. But Jock had a sad life in that cruel country, and when he failed to return one night and set me on a hopeless search, I could not help feeling that he had blindly settled in some remote corner quietly to die. And I too sought out remote corners to exhaust my grief.

Happily, it was still possible to make journeys to Alexandria and to share in the life of that gay city. In company with Lavelle, to whose friendship I pay a lasting tribute, I jostled among the natives on the open tram-cars and spent many pleasant hours in the friendly atmosphere of Mrs Dunn's hut on the Sharia Bulac. I was also able to exercise my journalistic pen on a variety of subjects and used up a fair share of the columns of the *Egyptian Gazette*. In one contribution I criticized the lack of hospitality shown by the British residents towards their defenders, for though none of us wanted to draw on the charity of people the reintroduction to

family and social life would have offset much of the irksome time we were having and prevented much reckless behaviour in the shady dens of Alexandria.

By the summer of 1919 the continued delay in demobilization so inflamed the men that officers were openly defied and the insurrectionary spirit began to grow. During the mass parade to celebrate the king's birthday there was practically dead silence when the call for three cheers was given and there was little response to the sound of the National Anthem. I felt the injustice as keenly as any one, and on the morning of 10th July I joined a committee that called a meeting of the men to decide on a definite course of action. We decided to draw up an ultimatum demanding demobilization within a stated time, failing which we should all go on strike and decide our own Orders of the Day. Within twenty-four hours a draft list for demobilization was posted up, and on the following Sunday I was among the party that journeyed to Kantara for the final disposal. I was setting out for the cliffs of Dover at last.

Whatever else had suffered in my nature, the war experience had not completely destroyed my religious convictions. Doubting clouds had certainly come over my mental horizon, but I could still find an emotional satisfaction in Holy Communion in the Y.M.C.A. hut and in offering thanks for a safe emergence from the conflict and for the sustaining power of human comradeship. Sitting next to an officer in the front row, I naturally expected that when the chaplain came to hand the chalice of wine to the communicants he would treat us all on equal basis in the sight of God and not pander to the privilege of rank. Imagine my surprise when he walked directly to the officer with the chalice before starting with the lower ranks at the beginning of the row. And when the officer accepted this priority of grace instead of spitting the wine in the chaplain's face, I felt too disgusted to take any further share in the service.

I wanted to ask the padre how many pips were required for a privileged access to the Kingdom of Heaven.

An early reveille on 23rd July was the signal for a hasty packing of kit-bags and a welcome departure to Port Said. Palgrave's *Golden Treasury* (looking like a battered warrior) and the diaries I had faithfully written had all the warmth of close companions, which I was determined to preserve at all costs. Bumping our way out of Kantara in crowded cattle-trucks, I looked back on that Babylon of military sterility for the last time and shed no passing tear for a place that deserved a worse fate than that of the ancient city. Then we boarded an old boat at Port Said, called the *Tagus*, and crowded on deck for the journey to southern Italy, from whence we were to take the overland route to England.

The least we expected from the army authorities was a pleasant homeward journey freed from the vexatious interference of bombastic officers, but so anxious were they to preserve the serf-spirit of the rank and file to the bitter end that they made us work like a lot of coolies on their stacks of luggage they were too idle to touch. The first trouble arose on the crowded decks of the *Tagus*, where a sergeant attempted to force a three-foot gangway between our recumbent forms to enable him to carry the whisky-and-sodas to tipsy officers in comfortable cabins. When a movement was made to throw him overboard he discreetly disappeared for the rest of the night. But the carrying of that beastly luggage on and off the boat and in and out of trains was all too meekly endured. One of the items was a full-size piano, while the amount of bedding and stuff for the personal comfort of these campaigners fully explained why so many officers wanted the jolly old war to carry on. For some of them it must have required no little effort to turn the latchkey themselves when they arrived at their own homes.

Entraining at Taranto in southern Italy, we met with a surprising amount of hostility from the inhabitants, who threw stones at the carriage windows and showed their displeasure at the peace terms, which had already been signed. But the journey through beautiful Italy was something to be remembered. Travelling in open cattle-trucks, we saw the full glory of the blossomed countryside under azure skies and were not at all dismayed when the train broke down for a number of hours and enabled us to become intimate again with fragrant hedgerows and ripening corn and fields of soft grass. Hosts of pretty Italian children gathered at every stop and sang their way into our hearts and the souvenirs out of our pockets. Then came the thrilling spectacle of Aix-les-Bains, where the waters of the lake reflected the rainbow colours of the hills and gave wonderful pictures as the train emerged from short tunnels cut through the rocks. At the end of the long Simplon Tunnel we came to the snow-capped mountains and a decided fall in temperature, and were glad to leave the Alps behind for the warmer atmosphere of the Rhône valley and the fertile plains of France. The elaborate wireless installation at the top of the Eiffel Tower was a forcible reminder of the crimson years that had passed, yet Paris still looked stately and serene from the banks of the Seine. After a brief stay at Boulogne we boarded the steamer and were soon craning our necks to see the white cliffs of Dover.

Beautiful were those white cliffs rising through the morning mist. Beyond lay the green fields of England like a smiling mother waiting to receive us and to bring back the wind and rain to our cheeks, for which we had so long dreamed in the desolation of the desert. Yes, I had craved for the sight of an English field, and as I sat back in the Dover express and feasted my heart and eyes on the passing landscape, I felt a reincarnation of spirit that left my war-self standing like a ragged scarecrow in the past. Lavelle wanted to talk, but I couldn't. I

wanted to see the little country stations and the peasants working on the land; old faces in the doorways of thatched cottages and children playing in summer gardens; in fact, I wanted to stare like a wondering child at the whole panorama of life and beauty before my eyes and keep thinking 'So this is England,' with a pleasant uprising of emotional pride. When the Crystal Palace came in view we saw England and Journey's End centred between those glass walls.

The demobilization officer was waiting to receive us, and also a horde of staff orderlies, who pounced on us like human vultures and extracted as much money as they could in the most unscrupulous manner. As souvenirs from the war areas were subject to confiscation these fellows were extorting pound notes for allowing the smallest items through, and the price for answering the simplest question was a handsome tip. To be faced by this scandalous piece of graft at the same time as the army, through the presiding officer, expressed thanks for our services, was a mocking tribute to what we had done and reduced the exultation of passing over into civil life to feelings of anger and disgust. I should like to record that I walked out of the army and the Crystal Palace with the smile of 'sweet content,' but the dismal truth is that I hurried out bursting with resentment, hailed a taxi, and without plan or purpose told the driver to take me to Euston.





## IV. Post-War Years

'Think of living.' Work then—'like a star, unhalting, yet unhalting.'

GOETHE

THE best cure for home-sickness is to return home. My return to England brought only a partial cure, for sitting in Euston station I realized that I had neither home nor friends to welcome me. I wanted to shake hands with or kiss someone, to look into understanding eyes, and to hear my own voice sharing the ecstasy of reunion with the land and people of my birth. But though I scanned the faces of hundreds of people passing in and out of the station, I received only the cold glance of strangers, and any pride I might have had in the war record standing to my credit was soon swallowed up in an intense feeling of isolation. In the excitement of demobilization I had not visualized my status as a civilian the other side of the military fence, so that while I sat stranded and undecided what to do I was faced by the fact that my career was broken up and that at the awkward age of twenty-seven I should have to start life afresh. But I still had health, a few pounds in wealth, and the courage of self-reliance to save me from being dismayed. The immediate need was to fling myself before someone I knew and to say: 'Here I am returned from the wars,' to introduce me back into civil life and to start the outflow of pent-up emotion. The trains for Birmingham start from Euston, so I must have had the instinct of the swallow when I set foot outside the Crystal Palace. I should at least be known by my sisters and brothers, though I had no intention of staying in that town of unhappy memories. It was only pressing human sentiment that sent me off to the booking-office.

I made a fortnight's stay with a family at Handsworth, to whom I had been recommended by one of my sisters. Here I heard the King's English transformed out of all recognition, and both parents and children electrified the atmosphere with a hysterical gaiety that exemplified the spirit of the times. The young daughter of the house, a girl of about fifteen, was something like an American squib, and the following letter I received from her a short time after I had left is not without interest:

DEAR OLD SWEDE,

I am not lost but gone before. The odour of our Old-World famous cheese has kept my hand still and my lips sealed, so I know you will forgive me for delaying the answer to your most welcome Epistle, which I received umpteen days ago. I say, that poetry was just great though I'm afraid I shall get the wind up if I ascend into that chamber of horrors. I went to another dance last night. Gee, we did dip, in fact if we had dipped much further the coffee would have been an awful mess. I danced with a most romantic youth. I liked every part of him but his feet. Phew, some beetle-squashers. I think he mistook my feet for some sort of insect once or twice.

But I think I better drop this brainless subject before I put my foot in it; I generally do that every time I open my mouth. (Some parish oven, what?) Besides what would father say if he knew. By the way that ointment has done wonders to the 'Old Bean's' throat; the worst part about it is that his collars are now about a mile too large and I'm afraid he'll have to have a tuck in them. I hope you are not bored by this apology of a letter but its these 'naples and taters' that are doing it; I shall have to change my diet.

So cheerio and much LUV from

IT

otherwise DIPPY,  
or the girl with the twisted eyelash.

For the first few days I walked the streets of Birmingham to recapture the sense of social freedom. To free

the mind of army connections was not an easy matter, and not having a home or job to make the transition more definite, I decided to seek the solitude of the countryside. The haunts of boyhood were calling me back and I hastened to the little village of Langley to see Pear-tree Cottage and Hillman's cows and the brook that still babbled its way across the bottom of the lane. And as I wandered 'lonely as a cloud' over the stubble fields and sat on the stile from which I used to wave to the 'Stratford Express,' and watch the rabbits disporting round the warren on the hill, I lived again those early years and felt deeply thankful that at least this part of Nature's bounty had been saved from the débâcle of the war. Not exactly though, for young farm-workers, who were as much a part of the landscape as sapling trees and growing corn, were mixed with the mud of Flanders and left in their honoured names a perpetual reminder of mankind's folly in enthroning the sword over the plough. For where indeed is the triumph of human faculty if it cannot arrange the laws of life in harmony with 'seed-time and harvest,' and with the productive energy of the good earth in providing for the sustenance of the world and not for its destruction.

But these reflections brought no peace of mind, so I walked down to the village post office to surprise old Mrs Butler and to hear how the boys and girls with whom I once played were now grown up and scattered; how the 'motors had made the village never like it was,' and how Pear-tree Cottage 'was in the hands of some modern folk from Brum, who have made it more like a museum than a place to live in.' When I passed by the little gate and affectionately glanced at the bedroom window from which I used to watch the cows sauntering up the lane and old Mr Carter standing in the early morning sun, I fervently hoped that Pear-tree Cottage would always remain to bridge the intervening years with the happy times it signified. I returned to

Birmingham more socially minded and ready to make a fresh start in life.

My chief problem was to get work. The vacuum-cleaner days seemed too far distant to pick up the threads of that job again and as I was among the late arrivals in the labour market there were precious few openings for ex-soldiers. When I visited the Army Appointments Office the first inquiry was concerning rank, as that seemed to be more important than my capacity to do something useful in life. I was given to understand that ex-officers had first claim on the Kingdom of Earth, as no doubt they will lay claim to the Kingdom of Heaven. So I answered a number of advertisements and lined up for public unemployment pay to keep going. If war service counted at all it was to handicap one in the labour world owing to loss of experience. Profits and not patriotism called the tune and there was a general lowering of wages with no corresponding fall in the cost of living.

People in comfortable circumstances were quite incensed by the fabulous war-time wages paid to the miners and the munition workers. According to drawing-room gossip every miner's cottage had a grand piano and working girls were actually wearing fur coats. Unfortunately, the criticism was rather unbalanced, for one heard little of the expensive sinecures of Whitehall and the prodigious profits made by a comparatively small number of people who had shared none of the dirt and dangers to which the miners and munition workers were exposed. Neither was there any arraignment of a Government that paid the soldiers such a miserable amount compared with its lavish expenditure in less important directions. In the Parliament of 1919 there were grouped together more wealthy profiteers than had ever gathered there before, and though 'Our country demands from every citizen the utmost economy'...

appeared in the king's speech, the salaries of the Ministers of State were more than doubled, while the pensions to the wounded and disabled soldiers were drastically curtailed. 'Unto him that hath, more shall be given' should have been written over the portals of the House of Commons.

After a few weeks of searching for work I picked up the *Daily Telegraph* one morning and read a short leaderette that eulogized the army authorities for promoting a course in journalism at the London University under the scheme for the higher education of ex-officers. If there is such a thing as astral benevolence that shapes the destiny of men then I must have come under my lucky star in reading that announcement, for the writer had the good sense to put the name and address of the secretary to whom one could apply. For years I had dreamed of such a school to put me on the high road to journalism and here was an opportunity too good to be missed. But my heart sank when I realized that the course applied to ex-officers, and that it was practically useless writing to Mr Vernon Wall. But I determined to press my claim by sending press cuttings of what I had written in the army and an account of the examinations I had passed in English literature. The usual army form came back and I filled it up with little hope (owing to this rank system of Rank) of hearing anything more about it.

Fortunately for my application the authorities had appointed Sir Sidney Lee in control of the school ('Oh, wisdom beyond compare!'), and I was astonished to receive a letter inviting me to an interview at the university headquarters at South Kensington. I remember buying a new suit of clothes for the occasion and rehearsing whole chunks of what I intended to say. Then, with a parcel of school certificates, references, and newspaper contributions under my arm, I journeyed to London with the apprehensions of a prisoner about to stand before a judge.

But in Sir Sidney Lee I found the judge kindly and gracious. Refusing to encumber his authority with military red tape, he gave me a considerate hearing and said that I was certainly the type of ex-service man for whom the course was really intended. But the difficulty was that I had not held a commissioned rank or attended a public school—stipulations over which the army authorities held control. And looking at my journalistic efforts before him he added with a most comforting smile:

‘I will do what I can to help you, Mr Garratt. I will personally recommend your application to the authorities and if you care to commence the course at your own expense and at the risk of having it ultimately turned down, you have my permission to do so. Let me know your decision within two days.’

‘I cannot wait two minutes, sir,’ I replied with bubbling elation. ‘I am prepared to take any risk so long as the slightest chance remains of being accepted. I am most thankful for your generous help.’

‘I wish you all success,’ was his parting sentiment.

How often are the lives of people influenced by the character of others. In the exercise of authority the want of sympathetic understanding or the slightest error of judgment might wreck a career or start a trail of havoc down the sunny ways of life. What my future would have been had not the kindly nature of Sir Sidney Lee supported me at that critical interview is a matter for speculation, but in the honoured memory of that great scholar his deep humanity is as dear to me as all his learning. I was to know him as a friend as well as a tutor.

When I received particulars of the course I was amazed both by the Government’s generosity towards ex-officers and by the splendid educational opportunities it opened up. Planned to cover two years’ study, an annual maintenance allowance of £150 was to be paid by the Government to each student in addition to the costs of the university and the final examination.

fees. And the prize to be won was a Diploma in Journalism, which, it was hoped, would act as a passport to a lucrative job in Fleet Street. The subjects I was to take were philosophy, general psychology, ethics, principles of criticism of literature and arts, history of journalism, composition, history of literature, history of political ideas, and French—which to one with only the background of an elementary education seemed a formidable syllabus to tackle. I nevertheless looked forward to entering the seminaries of London with a joyous heart, and within a month of demobilization I packed my bags and passed out of the smoke and smells of Birmingham like a boy going back to school.

As the railway strike was on I had to make the journey by motor coach instead of by train. The vehicle was filled by comfortable-looking business men, who spent most of the time abusing the infamous railway workers for daring to strike for higher rates of pay. More shocking to the old gentleman sitting next to me, however, was my own daring in saying something good about the workers and spoiling the general harmony of opinion. For this I was both unapologetic and unashamed, for the ego I was taking down to London was of different substance from the one of pre-War days. Paradoxically enough, the War had changed me for the good, for in the welter of suffering and hardship I had become more sensitive to cruelty and pain and to the possibilities of a world founded on justice and love.

Here I will pay my tribute to London. From the moment I entered it it became my spiritual home. The splendid paradox of sharing its surging life and law and order, with a fuller sense of one's individuality and freedom than is to be gained in the smallest village, gives it an atmosphere from which no provincial visitor can ever escape. Enter London with a friendly heart and the way is open for it to be friendly to you. No other city shows such good manners, and whether you want to draw on the knowledge of a bus conductor or on the



patience and goodwill of the multifarious drivers on the road, you will get what you want without fuss or excitement. And where else can you find such large-hearted tolerance of freaks and foibles that help to make up its cosmopolitan life? Individuality can spread its plumage without public restraint and you can as well stand on your head in the Strand as use it to express an opinion without the danger of having it knocked off. Wherever I live I shall be a naturalized Londoner to the end of my days.

My first lodging was in a small top-story room of a dingy-looking house in Albany Street. I fixed up here because it was near to Regent's Park, a place where mendicant students like myself could find peace for the purposes of study. This was most needful in view of the heavy traffic that perpetually shook the house, for there was little respite from the 'avalanche of noise' that broke over my studies until the small hours of the morning. Sitting by candle-light when this part of London showed some semblance of rest was like being lifted to the serenity of the stars, though it meant the frequent use of an overcoat to enjoy it.

At breakfast-time I was generally entertained by a fellow-lodger named Wilkins, who earned a precarious living by buying and selling Chinese porcelain. His method was to ransack all the small and out-of-the-way shops for the precious treasure and then to re-sell his 'finds' at an enhanced price to the wealthy West End dealers. And though Wilkins had lost his wife he had gained a fanatical enthusiasm for porcelain that thrilled him with more adventure than he could ever have derived from the discovery of a continent. Radiant dawns, beautiful sunsets, velvety skin, rainbow colours, the loveliness of flowers, and every other worldly sight to gladden the heart and tone up the impulse of life were all concentrated in this rare product of the East which formed the *raison d'être* of Mr Wilkins's entire existence.

One morning he crashed to pieces the landlady's favourite flower-bowl and was so overcome with grief that he burst into tears and left the house. If porcelain had given way to patriotism he might have been another Mazzini to illumine the heavens of fame. Wilkins was one of the unknown poets that have a Parnassus all to themselves.

My introduction to University College in Gower Street took place on Monday, 6th October 1919, when students assembled to 'report for duty' and to meet the professors. I remember gazing on the façade of this imposing building before ascending the steps and feeling a sort of apostolic succession to the old classical scholars who passed through similar portals in ancient Greece and Rome. Most of the students at this time were ex-service men fresh from the battle-fields and not exactly in the state of mind to maintain a rigid observance of the sedate traditions of the college. But tutors adapted themselves very amiably to the novel conditions, and probably found a keener earnestness and a better informed material to work on than they expected. Taking the journalism course were R. L. Megroz, Trevor Allen, and a number of other young writers who were destined to make some mark in the literary and newspaper world. Lectures had to be attended at the various colleges of London and the university sports ground was available to throw off surplus energy.

To celebrate the first anniversary of the Armistice, however, there was a display of surplus energy that highly displeased the authorities. A large body of students marched down to the Strand and captured a gun in the possession of Bart's, which they hauled back to the University College foreground and prepared to defend it against a counter-attack. The ammunition they collected consisted of sacks of flour, vegetables, eggs, and more injurious weapons, with which they assailed the medical students when their forces arrived at night. The battle that took place was called 'a rag' in university parlance, but judging from the state of Gower Street

that night and the wild intrusions made on the public thoroughfares the promoters certainly enjoyed the favour of the law by escaping the interference of the police. I am sure that if gangs of youths from the slums attempted to throw off surplus energy by such boisterous behaviour, the offenders would soon be hauled before the local magistrate.

The only criticism of the scenes came from the *Daily News* the next morning, when plans were made to march down to the offices of the newspaper and ceremoniously burn copies of the issue in public. As this was an orderly procession in which the central figure was a borrowed statue of Phineas Phin mounted on a cart, I confess to a direct share in the proceedings, for I got as much fun out of them as did the general public that witnessed them. I remember the Strand being blocked by what looked like a pagan festival, while the *Daily News* staff, so far from being offended by the conflagration, exercised the cheerful opportunism of journalism by amply turning it to business account. Of course one cannot shame Fleet Street into confessing its sins, for it acknowledges no difference between evil and good.

Within a month of the course opening I was relieved to hear that the authorities had approved of my admission to the university and of full payments as already outlined. It would have been a severe blow had the good offices of Sir Sidney Lee failed, for having spent most of my small army gratuity in books and in cost of living, it would have meant a return to the Labour Exchange and a disheartening frustration of ambition. In the lecture-room I was thoroughly happy and was now able to settle down to serious study and take full advantage of my good fortune.

All the tutors were of outstanding ability and I recall with pleasure the particular interest they took in ex-service students. Sir Sidney Lee taught the glories of English literature with scholarly sincerity, which contrasted with the light-hearted whimsicalities of Mr

Thomas Seccombe in unfolding the history of journalism. In Professor Dawes Hicks, philosophy and the higher good seemed to have a physical as well as a mental setting, for when he ascended to the realms of philosophical speculation he became too etherealized to be of the common clay of the universe. He really looked, by his little round face set in tufts of silvery hair, as if he had been born among the angels. Another fine lecturer was Professor Hearnshaw, who taught the history of political ideas with refreshing vivacity. R. A. Scott James was more dour and downright in imparting the principles of criticism of literature and art, while Professor Spearman led us into the mysteries of psychology with the spirit of a crusader. It was under his direction that we paid a most interesting visit to a mental asylum where modern methods of psychological treatment were being successfully applied. The art of composition we learned under the guidance of Mr E. A. Baker, who caused many of us to squirm by ruthless criticism of our brightest efforts. But the palm of patience goes to Miss B. Schlumberger, B.A., the teacher of languages, for she had to grapple with our national inaptitude to speak more than the King's English. The type of French that many of the students had acquired in the army was hardly acceptable to college examiners.

One evening I mingled with the crowds at Hyde Park Corner to hear what the public orators had to say and to contest my own views in the small 'committee meetings' that were always in session. A woman speaking against war attracted my attention. She pleaded for every one to join the Fellowship of Reconciliation, whose object was to Christianize national relationships and to settle all disputes without resort to force.

The speaker was Miss Muriel Lester, who was well known for her pacifist views and for her social work at Kingsley Hall in the East End of London. As she had rekindled my own hatred of war I sidled round the back

of the crowd and thanked her for the speech as soon as she stepped down from the platform. Learning that I was an ex-service man she immediately asked me to give my views from the platform. At first I trembled at the thought of speaking to an open-air audience, especially as hecklers were busy. But this was a challenge I could not resist. People could scoff at what they called the 'sentimentality of Christian Pacifism,' but the rational pacifism of ex-service men was more difficult to decry. So I jumped on the platform with a desperate determination to meet this need and to crush opposition by the weight of personal experience. But it was not so easy as I had imagined. In the grip of nervous tension I could hardly force words out of my mouth and I made the awful mistake of telling the audience that it was the first time that I had spoken in public. Then I suddenly became conscious of a thousand eyes staring into mine, some warm and sympathetic, others cold and critical and contemptuous of every pacifist claim. The first interruption composed my thoughts.

'We must honour the dead,' shouted a middle-aged man from the fringe of the crowd.

'We can best do that by honouring the living,' I replied, having already pointed out the mockery of celebrating Armistice Day while the survivors of the War were suffering the hardships of miserable pensions, appalling overcrowding in housing conditions, and reduction of wages to a bare subsistence level.

That first speech inspired me with a passion to propagate the message of the Fellowship of Reconciliation and I was soon speaking at two or three meetings a week in various parts of London. Highbury Corner was a very lively spot and war-time conscientious objectors were subject to a good deal of heckling. Many of the interrupters simply wanted to advertise their own war record, and if I kept my own long enough in the background I was generally assailed with: 'What did you do in the Great War, daddy?' 'Talk about war when you

know something about it,' 'If you 'd been through what I——etc., etc., when appropriate answers put me more or less on equal terms with every one in the audience. Few were the occasions when war was defended as a benefit to humanity.

The best kind of social service is that which is carried on unpretentiously and with the object of helping people to overcome the evil environment from which they suffer. Kingsley Hall was situated in one of the dark areas of Bow, George Lansbury's constituency, and was opened by Muriel Lester and her sister in commemoration of a deceased brother to whose memory they dedicated their lives by serving the poor. But serving the poor did not mean to them 'sandbagging' foul conditions with soothing sentiment and complacent servility; it meant drawing out the potential faculties of the young to despise ugliness and poverty and to set them on the mental 'highway' to abolish the social evils that made the ameliorative work of Kingsley Hall at all necessary. Christian Socialism was the keynote of the work.

Every night the hall was alive with some form of human activity that expressed the fellowship, joys, and attainments of those poor East Enders, and every one, from the tiniest child to the old age pensioner, found some provision to open the gates of laughter, and enlightenment and to 'things beautiful and of good report.' And what wonderful evenings those were. Those people who think of London as garish lights and West End suppers and the scintillating superficialities of prodigal wealth, parading ostentatiously in and out of gilded halls, should have spent a brief hour at Kingsley Hall watching a few score little slum-children given up to the ecstasy of *Oranges and Lemons*, of dancing round the *Mulberry Bush*, and of songs and games that set their souls on fire. Abstracted from the 'chasmed gloom' of dingy hovels, from verminous beds and nerve-strained elders, and from a domestic economy under which the cost of a week's food was less than is often paid for a West End

dinner, these children exercised their birthright with gleeful abandon and for a few happy moments enjoyed life freed of all its dregs. Or they should have seen the youths of both sexes intently listening to instructive lectures, negotiating their own committee work, or dancing through the Saturday evening hours in clothes as bright as their eyes. And if they could have stayed over to attend the Sunday Service they would have seen a family gathering of old and young exalted by prayer and praise and a stimulating talk given by Miss Lester or a visitor.

One of the visitors was Herbert Asquith the poet, who, desiring to know more about the East End of London, asked Muriel Lester to take him for a walk. Hoping to impress him with the ugly sights as viewed from the canal-side, she strolled him along a towing-path that on an ordinary evening would have revealed the gloomiest picture of architectural tragedies discernible under the stars. But it happened to be a moonlight night and so appropriate for poetic reflection that Mr Asquith saw only the beauties of silhouetted vistas and silvery shimmering waters before which he stood entranced. He vowed it was one of the loveliest experiences he had ever had. Then they proceeded to a fish-and-chip shop and had supper in true plebeian style. Another frequent visitor to the hall was George Lansbury, who knew too much about the district and the lives of his 'many neighbours' to sacrifice realism for poetry. Later on another Kingsley Hall was built and the work expanded.

If London was vast and full of political and sociological activities, my own ambition to encompass everything and to propagate a philosophy of life was no less extensive. I was reading extensively, listening extensively, and talking extensively—three extensions I have never had cause to regret. While university study occupied

most of my time I nevertheless had ample opportunity to speak at meetings, spend hours in the House of Commons, and keep up a rota of engagements of one sort and another. I embraced the Socialist creed because I could see no other way of freeing humanity from the triple curse of War, Poverty, and Drink. I condemned war from the platform of the Fellowship of Reconciliation; poverty I denounced through the activities of the Independent Labour Party, and the United Kingdom Alliance enabled me to strike at the Demon of Drink. Not that I dissociated one evil from the other when speaking from either platform, for in the last analysis there seemed a distinct relation between all three. Drink I considered the greatest menace, for it doped the minds of the people out of clear thinking and helped to make them a prey to the exploiter and to reactionary forces that plunged them into war. If I saw drink as the greatest immediate enemy of the Socialist Movement it was because I amplified my knowledge and experience among the slums of London and by noting its effects on working-class men and women who would otherwise have been in the fight for social and economic emancipation. Prohibition in America had so scared the brewers in this country that they were straining every nerve to tighten the shackles of the trade on the very people who had most to gain by shaking themselves free. From the top of the bus that went the length of Whitechapel Road I counted the number of public-houses set at every street corner, and then penetrated the poverty-stricken areas where the havoc of drink was more blatantly exposed. I resolved to hit this iniquitous monster as hard as I could though it meant coming into conflict with the pro-liquor lights of the Labour Movement.

The brewers and the Conservative Party have always been faithful allies in stemming the progress of the working-class, and there seemed no hope for the rise of Socialism until the minds of people were released



from the fetters of drink. Most Labour leaders held the popular, and probably the convenient point of view, that poverty and bad social and economic conditions provided the incentive to drink, which, in itself, was a habit not worthy of serious consideration. That alcohol stupefied the senses to the detriment of clear thinking and wise action was, in my opinion, a sound reason for branding it as a serious obstacle to the achievement of any great reforms based upon the popular will.

Faced with this apathy of the Labour Movement, I decided to write a pamphlet of rather a challenging kind on the subject. To do the job I spent many midnight hours in solitary confinement above London's traffic and bought a second-hand typewriter, which I learned to manœuvre with painful persistency. Then I sent the completed manuscript to Mr Philip Snowden (who was then probably the most feared opponent of the liquor trade in the country), and sought his blessing in the form of a foreword, which he wrote at once for my 'very brave and able pamphlet.'

The pamphlet, which I entitled *Labour and the Liquor Traffic*, was published by the International Bookshops Ltd, owing largely to the generosity of Muriel Lester. It caused at once something of a sensation in temperance circles, and, besides being well reviewed in the press, it brought me many congratulatory letters from eminent leaders of the temperance movement. Chief among these was one from the Right Hon. Leif Jones, president of the United Kingdom Alliance, who undertook to supply the cost of distributing twenty thousand copies among the trade union and trades council branches throughout the country. Nothing delighted me better than a circulation of this kind (without profit to myself, by the way), but though the effort to rouse fresh interest in the drink question among the people most vitally affected was made at such generous expense, there was scarcely a ripple of either protest or support to indicate that the pamphlet had survived the waste-paper basket. I

concluded that a 'down with drink' crusade had to follow out a literal interpretation to be acceptable to the trade union and Labour organization.

I was then engaged by George B. Wilson, B.A. of the U.K.A. to speak at many most important meetings. At a big demonstration in Kent I was surprised to see among the supporting people on the platform a parson of war-time memories — a former chaplain who was renowned for his alcoholic excesses in the land of the Bible. Just before I was called on to speak, he quietly slipped out of the hall to seek perhaps less embarrassing company.

As there was no organized effort among the Labour M.P.s, I suggested to Mr Philip Snowden the formation of a Temperance Group to show concerted action inside the House of Commons. This was his reply:

I have your letter suggesting the formation of a Temperance section of the Labour Movement. However desirable this may be I am afraid it is not possible, that is, in the sense of making such a group a part of the official machinery of the Labour organizations. Much less is it likely that the organizations would financially help such a group.

But I think there are possibilities of forming a voluntary Temperance group of Labour people. Such a thing did exist some years ago. It was called—well I forget the exact name, but it was something like the Temperance Fellowship of Trade Union Officials. It met each year on the occasion of the Trade Union Congress. In view of the large number of Labour M.P.s now in Parliament I think such a voluntary organization, somewhat wider in scope, might be formed, and it would be desirable to do so. You would be doing good work in trying to get such a group together.

I knew that where Philip Snowden had failed I was not likely to succeed, so I wasted no time in lobbying M.P.s in the cause of sobriety. If Labour leaders refused to recognize drink as a menace to the movement, then the urge to deal with the problem would have to come from the people themselves, to whose judgment

and good sense I continued to appeal from the public platform. There was no question of my being a kill-joy or a milk-and-water 'Pussyfoot.' I regarded the obstacle of drink, as I regard it now, solely in relation to social progress and, unlike the various temperance societies, was not prepared to divorce it from the attendant evils of poverty, slum conditions, and economic insecurity. There was no place for the squalor of drink in my ideal of Socialism, and the one had to be swept away in the process of the other being attained. No drawing-room was ever fashioned out of a pigsty.

From the turmoil of public oratory now let me enter again the 'valley of the shadow of books' which goes under the more conventional name of the Reading Room of the British Museum. If the madness of war should ever bring London toppling to the ground, leave me that hallowed dome and the room below it and I should be happy. For where else can one find in the 'city's surging strife' such a sanctuary for quiet reflection and communion of souls? When I first entered that circumference of lore and learning and staked my position for ever and a day among the 'rich garners of teeming brains' I felt as if I had responded to an ancient voice that had long been telling me to 'walk the glades of Hellas and be at peace.' Within the presence of that vast congregation of literary ghosts one had to be reverential, humble, and respectfully sincere—when to cough or sneeze was somewhat sacrilegious to the quiet intensity of mental convolutions and cranial sweat going on.

To me it was a brotherhood of books of whom I was happy to be a member. The only pedigree sought was diligence in the service of knowledge and understanding, and nobody went there without that being written on his brow. It mattered not if you were a poor journalist hack gathering facts for the editors of Fleet Street or a

famous professor preparing some erudite work for the Press—all were equal in that seminary of knowledge, and no one claimed the favour of the gods. To the ordinary student it was merely a convenient haven for earnest study but there were also extraordinary students there who would faithfully have sat at the tables till the crack of doom, if the alternative had been to spend their life in the outer world. They were chiefly mendicant old men in threadbare clothes who daily took up positions before piles of books over which they pored with feverish anxiety until the tinkle of the six o'clock bell compelled them to rise. I am sure that the love of books and an insatiable thirst for knowledge explained the mystery of such ritual, and in talking to some of the oldest habitués of the place I was not surprised to learn that to them the physical state hardly existed. It did exist, however, when George had a bad fit of coughing, for one knew exactly where to find him when his distress started to reverberate through the building. And for one to offer George a lozenge more out of sympathy than as a gentle reminder that he was a 'damned nuisance' (as was often whispered about) was to make him purple with shame for 'rending the peaceful atmosphere with guttural explosives.' But there were many Georges whose eternal presence was signified by a cough or a clump of feet, and if one or two surreptitiously ate a pocket lunch without moving from the tables it was because the span of life did not permit the amount of mental digestion they required. No wonder the curator at the door passed them through without ever daring to ask them to produce the permit. As well might he have challenged Charles the First about the Divine Right of Kings.

Happy is the student who can pursue his learning in the Reading Room of the British Museum. Even the old curators, who seemed an essential part of the collection over which they acted as guard and warden, had something distinctive to offer, for I remember being honoured

with exclusive information by one of them during the course of a conversation.

'That's a fine collection of books,' I remarked, in reference to the handsome library that adorns one of the private galleries. 'Some rare tomes up there, I suppose?'

'You're telling me,' replied the veteran in the conventional vernacular. 'Ere,' and he sidled up to whisper in confidential tones: 'Ther's a book up there that's really 'ot stuff; nobody can git at it 'cause it's locked up in the case; all about a 'ooer, they tell me.'

'Do you know the title of the book?' I asked, feeling rather intrigued.

'*Moll Flanders*, or somethin' like that. She must 'ave been a rum un, by all account. It's been lyin' up there for donkey's years.'

So, with this dark secret in his bosom, my old informer gained some zest from having to parade up and down within the shades of this doubtful character.

There were two reasons why I used the Reading Room a good deal. First, because it gave me access to books that I could not afford to buy, and second, because it provided the comfort and atmosphere for study that could not be got in cheap lodgings. To save travelling fares to and from the university I left Albany Street and rented a small room up among the chimney-pots of a lodging-house in Gordon Street, from which altitude I saw more tints of smoke than of the hidden sky. The landlady was a good-hearted Swiss woman, who slaved away from morning till night like a domestic drudge and who came to learn, like myself, of the unscrupulous scoundrels who prey upon the small lodging-house keepers of London. My own loss happened within the first fortnight I was there. Having become friendly with one of the guests, a man of cultured appearance, I was ensnared into loaning him a sum of money I could ill afford until the following morning. But morning came without man or money, and I was left poorer in pocket, but richer in wisdom.

It seemed always my fate to be thrust among suffering humanity. I believe that the more sensitive one is to the cruelty and suffering of the world the more likely one is to meet it.

This brings me to the inhuman conduct of a German couple to whose house I went to live. Attracted by the immaculate cleanliness of the rooms, I little thought I was helping to pay to keep a young daughter of the house slavishly employed in scrubbing and cleaning under the iron discipline of parental control. She was a pale-faced slip of a girl with Titian hair and most delicate features, and though about sixteen summers had passed her way she looked as if the sunshine had never met her skin. Saddened by continuous drudgery in that dungeon of a home it was pathetic to see her cleaning and dusting, dusting and cleaning with the mechanical regularity of a robot. The mother was one of those domestic tyrants to whom a speck of dust was more revolting than the wreckage of human life, and besides bullying the girl from room to room, I soon became convinced, from the screams that came from the basement, that she backed this up by periodical thrashings. I knew that to intercede with a vixen of this character would only make it harder for the girl, so when I found opportunities to talk with Molly (as she was called) I gave her to understand that she had at least one friend in her callous world. I was determined not to leave that house before I had opened the prison doors.

My opportunity came after the girl had been given a sound beating which left her very distressed on the following morning. She came up to my room like a crushed flower eager for the slightest touch of sympathy and friendly understanding. My anger flared up. 'Molly,' I said, 'you must leave this house to-morrow. I know a good hostel at Hampstead where the girls go out to do domestic work in the day-time and have all their evenings free. I have already spoken to the matron about you, and she is willing to take you in at once. Now go and pack up——'

'But I daren't——'

'Daren't do what? Daren't get away from your hell of a life into nice surroundings, where you will make friends and enjoy the freedom you have missed? Don't be silly; you must take this chance while you have it. Now cheer up and pack up for the first adventure you have ever had. I will see you quite safe.'

Well, Molly overcame her timidity and successfully carried out the secret plan of escape. In escorting her to the hostel she became a different girl and I am sure it was not long before her suppressed spirit was able to blossom forth in all its youthful beauty. Her mother never associated any of the lodgers with the 'monstrous intrigue,' as she called it. For my part I have never regretted the service I rendered to that unfortunate girl.

A more happy experience was that of seeking out some of the war-time comrades who were now settled again in civilian life. Jack Harvey I was particularly anxious to meet but when I called at his home I learned that he had gone up to Oxford and that his father, Sir John Martin Harvey, would be glad to receive me. Sir John was in bed suffering from the effects of a serious operation, and though he was not supposed to see visitors he was so proud of his son's participation in the War that he insisted on learning more about it. Looking very ill and less like an actor than he had ever done, he was glad for me to sit by his bedside and recall the time when he and his wife rushed a theatrical company to our encampment on Salisbury Plain to entertain us with comedy and drama. Neither did I forget to pay tribute to his kindness in supplying the corps with consignments of cigarettes, which in those days were as welcome as manna from heaven. About his son's experiences abroad he knew absolutely nothing, for, as he said: 'The rascal is full of Egyptology but empty about himself.' And to my amazement Jack had not even acquainted his parents

with the dramatic meeting of the German youth in Palestine, who had once attended his school. When I gave Sir John an account of the incident he said that nothing on the stage could stand up to that. Lady Harvey was also enthralled by the good things said about her son, but she could not hide the disappointment she felt at his refusal to accept a commission.

Then I discovered the ineffable Harry as cheerful as ever in one of the City banks. A reunion with Fulcher, Thompson, and Swann of the Port of London Authority was the inevitable outcome, and on one summer's evening we all met to celebrate at a West End restaurant with Miss Laurance of Newport as the guest of honour. Over five years had passed since we had last made merry in her Essex home—years of hardship and anxiety that had made us all a little prematurely old and less buoyant in spirit. But the laughter of the gods was with us on that occasion, for it was something to have escaped from the grisly toils of war with scarcely a scar of any importance. And as we exchanged the glad and sad news of contemporary history it was almost depressing to hear of the strange whim of fate that could strike Farmer Hare's daughter and other young friends into an early grave during the 'flu epidemic of 1918, while we, and thousands of other men, were brought through numerous 'ordeals of battle' safe and sound. But it was not a time to reason why but only to 'laugh and be merry,' and to toast one another's good fortune with simple philosophy.

Thompson, who had been my closest companion in the army, then invited me to meet his father, who was an evangelical pastor with unusual characteristics. He lived an almost entirely spiritual life and was so oblivious of worldly necessities that he never preached for a settled income and expected his family to subsist on the belief that 'the Lord will provide.' In practice it had been his wife and eight splendid children who had done most of the providing, which had been rendered more difficult



by their 'saintly sire' indulging a morbid and wasteful desire for pictures. His habit was to ransack the shops of all the pictures he could buy and trundle them home to a despairing wife, who was by no means pleased with this kind of Providential provision. And when his acquisitive temperature rose very high he pushed his treasures along on a handcart and his family nearly out into the street by dint of pictorial pressure. He survived his wife by many years.

The 2/5th L.F.A. Reunion Dinners commenced immediately after the War and I was able to attend the one of 1920. With the announcement appeared a striking piece of composition, that, for an appeal, was highly creditable to the unknown author. It ran as follows:

### THE MEMORIAL

At a recent unveiling of a War Memorial ceremony our thoughts were involuntarily carried back to those fields we knew best in war. The solitary places in Judea, marked sacred by the little wooden cross; there lay some companion of ours who had passed but a short day or two before, toiling as we were, singing as he toiled, now passed beyond, to sing and trudge no more. And we thought, too, of that vast field in the desert waste of Kantara, with its row upon row of simple wooden crosses, sacred because they also marked the passage of our brethren, and were the dividing line between them and us. The great unnumbered host in Flanders and all those other places wherever Britons and their fellows stood, and paid the greatest price of all, passed before our minds. Then came the thought that somewhere amongst those white fields were some of our own more intimate associates; those who had marched by our side, pitched their little 'bivvys' hard by ours, and lived in our own little community. They are gone. Surely it is fitting that we who remain, and have again the joy of living in our own home circle, should raise up some lasting memorial, as best beseemeth us, to those who will never return, who lay far from home and kindred, and have for ever passed over.

It was good to meet old faces at the festive tables and to revive the jokes and quips that had once cheered us.

in the trenches and on the desert. But are all reunion dinners of ex-service men carried out in the same way? Does the distinction of rank still parade in civilian garb by all the ex-officers sitting at the table of honour while the former lesser ranks serve up the homage of implied inferiority in the accustomed military fashion? And must the atmosphere be spoiled by excessive drinking and every speaker feel obliged to wallow in smutty talk for the sake of good fellowship and for the crude assumption that nothing more intelligent is required? Does 'pride of the regiment,' or of whatever corps it may be, still rule out the slightest criticism of war and take for granted that every one 'present will unquestionably plunge into the next Armageddon? For if so then the disappointment I felt at that 1920 gathering has had good cause to increase through the intervening years. To keep alive the spirit of comradeship does not mean perpetuating a sentimental regard for the atrocious conditions from which it sprung, but rather to cleanse it of the primitive dross that clogs individual sanity and reason and keeps it exposed to the machinations of the war-mongers. For this reason the British Legion can be as much an instrument for war as a blessing to many of its survivors. Controlled by ex-officers, it keeps in constant mobilization a disciplined sentiment of the trenches that could easily be roused into martial action again, regardless of past experience. Men who submit to mass renderings of *Abide With Me* and *Land of Hope and Glory*, and accept the sentimental charity of Poppy Day in proportion as they ignore the duty of a Government to provide for the casualties of war, are not likely to exercise and act upon sane individual judgment in times of national crises. Neither does the glorification of personal experiences in war, as implied in the public display of medals and in annual marches to church, present ex-service men in a favourable light. As war, to me, was a bestial and an unholy experience that I never want to pass through again, the only comradeship

I consider worth perpetuating is that which will help my fellow-men to drive this curse off the face of the earth so that the comradeship of love and goodwill shall rise triumphant over that of the fields of death.

Give me your hand, my brother, search my face;  
Look in these eyes lest I should think of shame.  
For we have made an end of all things base;  
We are returning by the road we came.

To make an end of all things base, however, meant the application of Christian principles in a manner that had not previously been attempted in personal and social life. And still having a moderate faith in the power of the Church to be in the vanguard of human progress I attended the King's Weigh House to gain inspirational food from the lively sermons of Dr Orchard, who was probably the most socialistic ecclesiastic of the day. Here I made the acquaintance of Miss H., of Nottingham, a young lady who had been renounced by her family as a penalty for hunger-striking in prison during the suffragette days, and for daring to show active intelligence on behalf of her sex. Our companionship was devoted to long discussions on religious and political problems, supplemented by a cup of coffee at Lyons's tea-shop near the Marble Arch. And if at the same table sat Bonar Thompson or other agitators 'fresh from the fields of oratory' round Hyde Park Corner, no Parliament of Man could have surpassed the animation that flared up on those occasions. As the premises are now enlarged perhaps the proprietors realized that more spacious rooms had become a public necessity.

The truth was that I was drawing closer and closer to the settled conviction that the Religion of Humanity was the only dogma worth troubling about. To recognize this fact was to ennoble one with the best that Christianity had to offer. It was conduct alone that mattered. This life I knew, with all its triumphs and tragedies and personal responsibilities for creating good

or ill, so why worry about the mysteries of orthodox faith and of heavenly rewards when there was a plain duty to be performed here on earth. Make the best of this world and the next will look after itself. Had humanity yet justified its existence? Looking back through history with its endless tale of cruelty and suffering, and reflecting on the paradoxical perversity of human nature in becoming more diabolical in organized slaughter the more it advances in knowledge and understanding, I realized the mockery of empty platitudes sounding through the churches and of prayerful devotions in face of such results. In discussing the subject with some of my friends I was impressed by the lack of faith in man and his capacity to evolve a happy and peaceful universe. All the tragic happenings to humanity were ascribed to the will of God and since they always had been, so they must always continue. But why worship an omniscient, all-powerful, and merciful Godhead if the evils arising from human frailty were inevitable? Was the Church a refuge from personal responsibility—an institution for fostering a herd-like complacency towards man's inhumanity to man by drawing the consciousness into metaphysical obscurities? It was easy to bolster up selfishness and greed, wars and suffering and exploitation of the weak, by organized religious indifference, but suppose men and women withdrew from the abstract and kept their hearts and minds centred on the facts of mortal existence which they judged in accordance with their own experience of right and wrong; would their intelligence and emotional reactions bestir a more humane attitude towards worldly affairs and by nobler individual conduct increase the happiness and well-being of the whole? This growth of individual consciousness of human capacity to achieve general happiness by a steadfast refusal to inflict suffering on others, was, to my thinking, an all-sufficing religion that would bring swifter salvation to mankind than all the perplexing creeds of the theologians. The much abused

phrase, 'Man, Know Thyself,' could have no loftier interpretation. It was in the social manifestation of religion that I sought its value and, having the vision of a world swept of its sordid selfishness and stupidities, I was forced to the conclusion (which I still retain) that only by the universal application of the Religion of Humanity could such a vision be realized.

The University of London was by no means too crust-bound in traditional conservatism to be intolerant of such views. Indeed, there was a strong Labour section that was particularly voluble at debates and the Soviet system of Russia received a considerable amount of support. A memorable occasion was when Mr Bernard Shaw came to fire off high explosives on Presentation Day. Before him sat an academic audience, for the most part in robes of red, and it seemed most appropriate for Shaw to 'raise the scarlet standard high' in defence of Socialism and at the expense of Capitalism. Without a note in his hand and with rich melody in his voice no speaker could give a more perfect example of oratory. To make professors laugh in such a sedate atmosphere was an achievement of the first magnitude.

One of my favourite haunts for debate was at an 'upper room' in the Strand, where the Old Crogers met every Saturday evening to discuss the topical events of the week. This Boswellian gathering of debaters had persisted since the time when Johnson poured out his wisdom on the world, and the use of the doctor's old chair was a fitting tribute to his dictum that the desire for the increase of knowledge 'must be first kindled by some external agent.' This was shown by the magnetic spell it cast over journalists, preachers, and budding young lawyers of the Inns of Court, who came in to brush up their oratorical wits in preparation for the lofty positions to which they aspired. My own contributions were generally too dynamic for the older members, but there was a good-hearted tolerance that kept the pro-

ceedings enjoyable. Many famous men can no doubt look back with gratitude on their association with this ancient society.

I also met about this time a number of interesting people who were in the limelight of public attention. In the miners' struggles of 1921 and after no leader was more slanderously criticized than A. J. Cook—not because of any weakness in leading his men, but because of his courage and tenacity in leading them all too well. I met A. J. on several occasions and always found him unswervingly loyal to the cause he had at heart. In the broiling heat of that tropical summer he led the campaign for better mining conditions with fiery enthusiasm. Rushing from one meeting to another and expending prodigious vocal energy with the sweat pouring off his face, he carried on until his voice petered out and rest became imperative. Though hated and feared by the leaders of the Labour Movement, A. J. was beloved by the rank-and-file workers, who were not slow to appreciate the sincerity with which he fought and struggled for their welfare.

Later on I joined the 1917 Club, which was the rendezvous of the intellectuals of the I.L.P. In those unpretentious rooms in Greek Street sat many interesting personalities with whom one could discuss all the subjects under the sun. To be opposite Ramsay MacDonald at the dining-table was to share some of the reflected glory of popular esteem of which he was becoming supremely conscious. Major Attlee, who probably never dreamt of becoming Opposition Leader, was a delightful conversationalist, while H. W. Nevinson beamed friendliness to all and sundry. Elsa Lanchester was a frequent visitor and there was no mistaking her Titian features under a large black hat. C. E. M. Joad looked the philosopher that he is, and to Rae Robertson I am much indebted for his brilliance at the piano and for the many delightful talks we had on music and the arts. But the club, alas, is now only a memory—a

pleasant memory, nevertheless, of cultural fellowship, keen discussions, and fireside reflections over friendly books.

Now, in relating these various activities, I should remind the reader that I was still a university student of whom it might well be asked: 'Whenever did this fellow do any serious study?' Well, one can accomplish much under the security of a Government allowance, and having realized the daily percentage of time at lectures and in the 'swotting dens' of colleges, I had ample reserve for contributing to the life of the outer world. As there is nothing particularly thrilling about the routine of university procedure I hope it will be taken for granted that I was a diligent student who could always answer the roll-call and be seen (weather permitting) sitting on the steps of University College in bookish cogitation. But the best outdoor seminary during those sweltering days was the grassy slopes of Primrose Hill, where I lay sprawled out among the browsing sheep and with the shades of Lamb and Hazlitt to inspire contemplation. The passing hours were of little moment till the roar of hungry lions came up from the Zoo to remind me that I too was craving to be fed by Messrs Lyons in the hubbub of Camden Town. There was no margin for luxuries after the costs of a modest upkeep had been paid.

Neither was there much margin in either time or money to indulge in any serious love affairs. Fortunately for the demands of sex there was a healthy comradeship between the male and female students of the university, while the feminine element of Slade provided further attraction in keeping with their artistic accomplishments. But under this reign of sex equality the masculine gallant had a very lean time and was not seriously challenged until one afternoon when the assembled class was waiting for the appearance of Professor Spearman. When the

door opened in bounded Miss L., with her attaché case, which also opened, and deposited on the floor a mass of feminine accoutrements, including silk underwear of attractive appearance. Instantly a dozen strong hands stretched out to pluck from the burning, for there seemed a danger of Miss L.'s face setting the garments on fire. The lecture was on 'The Frailties of the Human Mind,' but I am sure there was one pupil who would rather it had been on the 'Frailties of Locks and Bolts.'

The weakness of man comes into its own during moments of loneliness. Walking along in this mood one summer's day, my eyes conveyed a mystic message to those of a young lady who was apparently set for 'tuning in.' We stopped to gather each other's thoughts and then to exploit the beauties of nature in Kew Gardens in fulfilment of lofty intentions. With apparent innocence she then exploited my pocket by suggesting an expensive dinner (which I could ill afford) at a Chelsea restaurant, where she displayed her pearls and diamonds and art of conversation, in the course of which I learnt that she was a young wife (with no external indication) of a famous Chelsea artist, from whom she was becoming estranged. If she wanted me to fill the matrimonial gap it was evident that I should have to submit to the extortion of which she was eminently capable, and when I received letters asking for expensive presents as the price of her friendship I realized how materially lofty her intentions were. After that experience I became chary of cultivating the friendship of women and delayed all thoughts of seriously falling in love.

Towards the end of my second year at the university I studied at full pressure in preparation for the final examinations, which I hoped would obtain me the Diploma for Journalism. The examiners threw out a stiff challenge to us and kept us in a hot perspiration for a fortnight. Then I received the gratifying announcement that I was among the successful candidates who would receive the diploma on Presentation Day. When



that day duly arrived and I took my place among the throng of gowned professors and successful students, I confess to feelings of justifiable pride in having achieved so much. Of the hundreds of students who received awards that day, I was probably the only one with a background of factory experience and an ordinary elementary school education.

This ended my university career; I was deeply indebted to the Government for recognizing my War services in such a generous way. I had spent two happy years in hard study in a congenial atmosphere; and now, thrown again on my own resources, I was ready to conquer Fleet Street and to realize a life's ambition.

If Sir Sidney Lee's interest in his students had empowered him to plant each of us in editorial chairs, he would have marched us down to the newspaper offices the next day. All he could do was to congratulate us on our attainments and hope we could find positions suitable to our needs. What none of us had reckoned upon was the cold attitude of Fleet Street towards the school and the prospect of journalism becoming saturated with university mentality. This prejudice was probably right. For mere academic attainments should not necessarily carry a passport to positions that require skill and experience. Not the least weakness of our industrial and commercial system is that so many of the managerial and key positions are kept as the close preserve for university graduates, who may have the education to talk but not the competency to control a business. The profession of journalism, however, is more jealously guarded, and academic distinction is less important than the ability to write. In fact, I was soon to learn, in seeking for a position, that my winning of the diploma made no impression on editors and was best left out of account. Practical experience on a newspaper would have served as a much better qualification.

Nobody realized this difficulty more than Sir Sidney Lee, who was most anxious that ex-service students

should not suffer further setbacks in their careers. In my own future he showed a very warm interest and flattered me with the opinion that my talents should secure me a well-paid post. One day I received a communication from him in the following terms:

I have been asked to recommend a suitable candidate for the post of chief steward at Shakespeare's birth-house at Stratford-on-Avon, and though I have you in mind I doubt whether the position is worthy of your talents. You might find the work congenial but as the salary would not be more than £200 per annum, I think you require something more progressive than that. However, as the decision rests with you I would like to talk the matter over with you at my home, and shall be pleased to see you next Monday at 5.30 p.m.

When, as a youth I once peeped through the windows of Shakespeare's house with rising emotions, I little thought that one day I should be asked to superintend that historical abode. But I could not stem my passion for journalism and Sir Sidney agreed that my ambition demanded something different. Later on there was a vacancy for a sub-librarian at the London University, and again his good offices were exercised on my behalf.

Whatever knowledge and adaptability I had, the want of practical experience was a barrier I could not overcome. Try as I would, my achievements in writing were not sufficient to convince editors that I had a flair for journalism, and I had to face up to the unpleasant truth that my nose would either be kept out of Fleet Street or I should have to force it in. I therefore decided to become a freelance and to make a living on my own.

My first opportunity to be first with the news came through an incident at the house where I happened to be living. An elderly woman rented a room near to my own and one morning the landlord could get at

response from repeated bangings on the door, and becoming alarmed, asked me to help in forcing an entry. Bursting the door open, we found the half-clothed woman lying dead across the bed. I seized the chance to scribble out a 'story' and rush with it to Fleet Street. When it appeared in print the landlord became mighty indignant about the 'injurious publicity,' which he wished to avoid, and said that he would like to crash the brains of the journalist who had shown such indecent haste. He little thought that the rent he was about to receive for my room was part of the proceeds from that professional enterprise.

And that was journalism—the flair to seize on a situation of news-value and to exploit it for personal profit without scruple or moral sentiment. But don't be scandalized. The insatiable curiosity of millions of readers is waiting to be fed and journalists must needs trample over conventionality. Nothing is sacred or worthy of respect. Yet, though apparently inhuman, the journalist is the most human of men, for the flair of being able to see at a glance what is of news-value for millions of readers gives him a deeper insight into human nature than is possessed by the average man. If at times he shows a ruthless eagerness to ferret out information regardless of people's feelings, it is less on account of unscrupulousness than because the soulless imperatives of the press compel this 'garbaging for news.' But what an adventure it is! In the multifarious happenings of everyday life endless discovery is open to the enterprising journalist who has the courage and tenacity to explore. In my own experience of freelance journalism, courage, and still more courage, was the keynote of all my activities, for though ability to write accounted for ten per cent of success, the remaining ninety was in the courage I employed in leaping the boundaries of my normal self.

My first business was to let editors know I existed—not through the post, but actually in the flesh. To work in competition with the organized staffs of newspapers

and the huge number of freelance journalists already established seemed a formidable task, but I knew that if I 'delivered the goods' in person and showed the sort of enterprise by which the editors themselves had reached their positions, I should do much better than by remaining a phantom contributor. Fleet Street has always had a soft heart for the 'gate-crasher' who has something to offer.

One of the best friends I had was Charles Pilley, who succeeded Bottomley as editor of *John Bull*. Knowing my struggle, he invited me to send in contributions and gave me the necessary hints of his particular requirements. This meant finding cases of hardship, cruelty, and injustice that called for exposure and denunciation, and I soon became a sort of Sherlock Holmes, prepared to delve anywhere and everywhere in search of copy. In the slums and on the Embankment and round the walls of prison and workhouse I found sufficient suffering and injustice to keep me busy. The harsh way with which the 'broken heroes of the War' were treated by the pension authorities was a particularly sore grievance among a large number of men, and the tales of misery I heard in unfortunate homes would have softened the heart of the hardest apostle of National Economy. It hurt the pride of disabled ex-service men to be at the mercy of patronizing charitable societies that bolstered up the default of the Government in not making adequate provision for a decent family life.

Then I wrote many of the 'Candid Communications' that appeared in *John Bull* and had the pleasure of arraigning or eulogizing many famous people for their conduct in public affairs. In reviewing these open letters it is good to be reminded that the Rt Hon. Winston Churchill, M.P., could as well hang on as build a wall, as shown by the collection of paintings he exhibited in Paris under the name of 'Charles Morin'; that Mr Justice McCardie could curse a man of good character whom he had sentenced for theft, in the following strain:

'Your wife henceforward is the wife of a felon, your children now have a felon for their father, your friends, acquaintances, and relatives will shun the society of a felon'; that the late Dick Sheppard was called upon by his Christian brethren to explain the calling in of the Guards' band to brighten the church service, and the opening of St Martin's as a dormitory for the outcast; and that the Earl of Essex was once the star comedian in the Bodenham Villagers' Pierrot Party. But adaptability in journalism often means compromising one's convictions, and when I was asked to fill the gap due to R. J. Campbell's illness I felt it was my unreal self who wrote his weekly feature.

To write for *John Bull* one day and for the *English Review* the next gave both mind and pen a Jekyll and Hyde existence. The first time I met Austin Harrison, who was the editor of the *English Review*, I was armed with an article on 'The War Poetry of Soldier Poets,' which I was anxious for him to publish. He received me with interest, and when I put the manuscript in front of him he remarked: 'You believe in love at first sight, I can see.' I did, and I was right. After audibly reading the first few lines and then scanning the remainder of the article, he exclaimed:

'This will suit me quite well. The War poets have been sadly neglected, especially those who spared us the sentimentality of Jingoism. That opening phrase, "Soldier poets are the true historians of the War," is good. Civilian poets were a damned nuisance.'

I stated in that article that War-poetry was likely to be misunderstood because the emotions and experience it portrayed were too abnormal and severe for easy appreciation, and required a 'stepping out' of the ordinary current of life. Besides, it would be thwarting the intentions of Mars and his host to allow these bards to steal a little more fire from heaven for the sake of the world's peace. If civilian poets could not write a Hymn of Hate they were less inclined to write a Hymn of Love,

and it was indeed refreshing to remember that at a time when the gospel of hate was being preached at its highest, Hamilton Sorley was addressing Germany as early as 1915 in the following strain:

You are blind like us. Your hurt no man designed,  
And no man claimed the conquest of your land.  
But, gropers both through fields of thought confined,  
We stumbled and we do not understand.  
You only saw your future bigly planned,  
And we, the tapering paths of our own mind,  
And in each other's dearest ways we stand,  
And hiss and hate. And the blind fight the blind.

When it is peace, then we may view again  
With new-won eyes each other's truer form,  
And wonder. Grown more loving-kind and warm,  
We 'll grasp firm hands and laugh at the old pain,  
When it is peace. But, until peace, the storm,  
The darkness, and the thunder and the rain.

Truly a genuine reminder that the Peace Treaty did not come from the stuff of which poets are born.

Remunerative as these articles were, my chief work was obtaining copy for the daily newspapers that accepted my contributions.

To do this, my ears and eyes were continually set to receive any information of news-value and whenever possible I sought the opinion of the expert to add weight to the story. Then every evening I rushed down to Fleet Street with the copy and generally found it in print the next day. As none of the work was commissioned, however, it was amusing to find the stories coming from 'Our representative' in newspapers that had given me no invitation to represent them in any way.

A journalist to whom I was greatly indebted was W. K. Midgley of the *Daily News*. Attracted by the sort of copy I took in he sent for me one evening to give a little flattering encouragement in a special effort I was

making to expose some of the worst housing conditions of London. The Lloyd Georgian battle-cry of 'homes fit for heroes to live in' was still echoing in the public mind but there was little appreciation of the terrible unfitness of some of the homes to which the heroes had returned. A glaring example was that of a house I visited in Bethnal Green. It consisted of two rooms that measured twelve feet square each, which were occupied by an ex-service man, his wife, and six children, and another about to be born. The place was infested by rats. They broke through the living-room floor, ate the food in the pantry, tore to shreds whatever clothes were lying about, and brought the pictures down from the walls. Three small beds pushed closely together filled the bedroom, while round the walls and practically level with the beds were a number of gaping rat-holes, from which the rodents emerged every night to scamper over the children's faces and render sleep impossible. One of the little girls was badly bitten on the nose and was receiving hospital treatment. This made it necessary for the parents to keep the gas-light on all night and to take turns in keeping awake to drive the rats back into the holes. The fortnightly gas-bill rose as a result and a rent of 12s. 3½d. a week was charged for the privilege of living amongst the vermin. Bundles of food had to be hung on a line outside for protection and as soon as one hole was filled up the rats broke through another part of the walls and floors and turned family life into a nightmare. To use the words of the sanitary inspector, the only cure was dynamite, but, as overcrowded London could offer no alternative accommodation, these unfortunate people had to grin and bear it. Indeed, they did more than grin and bear it; they preserved cheerfulness and self-respect and their habits of cleanliness to an amazing degree, in spite of conditions which an editorial in the *Daily News* described as 'more nearly resembling trench life on active service than an English home in the twentieth century.'

The rat-pest in the East End of London was appallingly widespread and a thorough disgrace to modern civilization. Whole streets with occupied basement rooms that had been condemned long before the War suffered from the plague and intensified the misery of poverty-stricken people. So numerous were the rats in the foundations of these rookeries that in some of the rooms I visited half the floor-boards had been forced up, fire-grates had been brought down, and frightened children were often found in the dead of night with ugly specimens crawling against their warm bodies. I vividly remember entering a room just after a distressed mother had crushed a fat intruder against the wall with the bed and seeing the blood over the sheets and upon her little child's night-dress. How such mothers managed to keep their sanity under conditions so hideous was a mystery I could never fathom. To battle against the havoc of the rats was trying enough, but the nervous strain of protecting children from the terrorism of the pests seemed beyond human endurance. Rats running over children's faces, indeed! No borough councillor ought to sleep with an easy conscience while families in his ward are afflicted in this revolting fashion.

Then I discovered three families living under a tarpaulin sheet in the front enclosure of an empty house in Camberwell. The space was divided into three small 'shacks' that accommodated six adults and twelve children. The only light came through an aperture made by propping up the tarpaulin, and the cooking was done on a fire-bucket outside. Snow and rain fell on the beds in the winter and had caused much illness among the children. All the husbands were ex-service men and, though the empty building had housed soldiers during the War, they were not allowed to use a portion of it until suitable houses were available. As one of the women rightly said: 'We want to be treated as human beings, not like animals.'

Now, though I was getting my living in finding ou



and writing up press stories about these wretched conditions, I was truly anxious to help the people concerned by means of public exposure. Municipal authorities can be notoriously indifferent about local scandals that bear on the poor, and it is not until their civic pride is challenged by incriminating publicity that action is taken to remedy the evils. For this reason I was not averse to going into the most sordid hovels to find out how people lived and what sufferings they endured. One can form a mental picture of the squalor and degradation of slum life in the mass without being seriously disturbed, but it is much more distressing to stand in homes of unutterable gloom and indecency, and to see for oneself the crowded rooms and ill-nourished children and nerve-strained mothers battling against hunger and illness with unremitting energy. Often I saw the struggles of my own mother repeated in the lives of these women, and if they showed courage in turning every task to the best account there was also the pathos of their growing prematurely old and of being held to an infamous fate that kept their lives as dull and derelict as the buildings around.

To get into many of these places needed an introduction by someone whose motives were known in the district; therefore I made the acquaintance of a Mr Jarman, who was connected with the social work of the Seamen's Mission. Under his guidance we made a number of visits to the 'convicts' haunts,' which generally comprised an underground room in which the men sat on forms before a blazing fire. And what a study they were! Gazing into the fire with all the silence and mystery of the Sphinx, it was with the utmost difficulty that I got any one to talk and to cast off the sense of social ostracism. They lived in their own private worlds of crime and punishment and gave nothing to, nor asked anything from, the people who approached them from outside. The only time at which many of them ventured into the social order was on Sunday afternoons,

when they received hospitality at Charrington's Hall in Mile End Road in the form of a large mug of tea and a plate of food. I helped at this event on many occasions and saw human life at its lowest ebb. As only a limited number of men could receive this refreshment they lined up for hours before the doors opened and presented a pathetic picture of poverty and degradation. With only rags to their backs they stood shivering in the cold and snow, and looked ready to burst into tears if they were among the unfortunates who had the door shut against them. One of the saddest sights of my life was to see these half-starved men drift silently away without the friendly warmth of a meal and a handshake to cheer them on.

One evening Jarman marched me into a dingy building that was used by Lascar seamen who had been paid off the boats. A single gas-jet was burning and in the shadows of the remote end of the room a party of Lascars sat gambling with tense faces. Two of them instantly jumped up and rushed forward as if to attack us, but hearing Jarman's well-known voice they subsided. He informed me afterwards that many of these Lascars literally starved while waiting for fresh commissions and could be found at night crouching in corners and alleys half dead. It was while in that state that they could be dangerous to strangers.

Thus I acquainted myself with all shades of life in the East End to gain news-stories for the 'dailies.' But as the payment for these was only on the line basis, it was more lucrative to go out for 'specials' which editors bought outright for a higher sum than if the work were broadcast to various newspapers at the standard rate. This required extra energy and enterprise if the copy was to be exclusive, and as the opinions of eminent people often came under this heading I sought and gained interviews with many interesting personalities.

At the age of eighty-six Dr John Clifford was a wonderful old man and talked vigorously about the need

for a general election and a Parliament composed entirely of principled men. Among principled women Sybil Thorndike took a high position, for in our talks at her Chelsea home she was most definite in her views about the theatre and would not allow a word to appear in print for which she could not be held responsible. But my best 'scoop' was an exclusive interview I gained with Lord Robert Cecil in the autumn of 1922. At that time Lord Robert was trying to infuse the League of Nations with official sincerity, and all his pronouncements were of public importance. One day I learned by chance that he had made an unexpected return from Geneva to attend a meeting at headquarters in London, and realizing that probably no other journalist would be on his track, I hurried to Grovesnor Gardens to seek an interview. As the meeting was on, I got in touch with his secretary, who informed me that as Lord Robert would have to hurry away to catch a train at King's Cross, he could not possibly spare the time to see me.

'Will you ask him if I can accompany him to the station?' I rather audaciously inquired.

'I will see what I can do,' obliged the secretary and departed. She returned to say that Lord Robert would be glad for me to ride along with him, and in a few moments I was sitting beside him in a taxi taking mental notes of what he had to say.

I was also the first journalist to make known the installation of the Maudslay collection of Maya sculptures in the British Museum. This came about by my noticing a huge monolith suddenly appearing in the portico and learning from Mr T. A. Joyce, the deputy-keeper, that it was part of the famous collection that was to be put on exhibition after lying in the basement of the Victoria and Albert Museum for over thirty years. With all the official information at my disposal, I arranged for photographs to be taken of the exhibits and wrote up a full account which the chief newspapers readily accepted as an important news item.

These conquests were both adventurous and remunerative. I had learnt by practical experience what hundreds of aspirants paid good sums to obtain in the various schools of journalism. Always on the trail and look-out for suitable information I could as easily enter the poorest doss-house as the ducal chamber, and share the failures and triumphs, the sorrows and joys of common humanity. For to the journalist's eye every part of life becomes the whole, while the whole is never absent from view. Every day was a venture for new discovery and enlightenment, and so long as I had a pencil and pad in my pocket and courage in my heart I never had to walk the streets with an empty stomach. One of my best assets was the flattery that most people enjoyed in seeing their own name in print. Though I represented no particular newspaper, to be 'interviewed by a representative of the press,' and to have the prospect of having one's opinions circulated over the country the next day, made a strong enough appeal to personal vanity to keep most doors open to my intrusions. So I interviewed all sorts of authorities on the prevailing problems of the day. Speculation in farming, raising the status of domestic service, the need for Public Defenders on behalf of the poor, the demand for a purer milk supply, more playgrounds for children—these, and many other topics of public interest, gave me the entree to expert pronouncements. And Fleet Street never failed to recognize my efforts.

There is no mistaking the fact that knowledge is power. Specialization is excellent provided that one's talent can be fully utilized, but in a world of changing values the versatile person can often be more successful in maintaining a foothold in the struggle of life. In my own experience I had always acted on the belief that the more one's mind is open to the accumulation of general knowledge the more one is able to overcome any sort of environment.

From a boy I had taken a keen interest in association

football, and when I came to read the reports of games in the Sunday newspapers, I could see no reason why I should not extend my journalism to the realm of sport. I therefore approached the editors of three well-known Sunday newspapers, who gave me the job of reporting the home matches of Brentford and Queen's Park Rangers on alternate Saturdays. This meant writing up three different reports of the same match and getting them into the editors' offices by seven o'clock the same evening, which required not only mental acrobatics in composition but also a swift dash across London. This was free-lancing with the gloves off. My procedure was to reach the ground in time to garner any important information from talkative officials before taking up position in the press seats of the grand-stand. One report I wrote as the match proceeded, and when the final whistle blew I hurried to the dressing-room to have a few words with Patsy Hendren or with one of the visiting players. Then I sought a corner of a Lyons's tea-shop and with the aid of a cup of tea scribbled off the two other reports before rushing down to Fleet Street with not a minute to spare. It was satisfying, however, to see the three reports in the newspapers on the following morning.

It then occurred to me that I ought still further to supplement my income by teaching in the London County Council Evening Institutes. So I went to the County Hall and asked for an interview with Mr R. Blair, the chief education officer. He smiled indulgently at my request.

'These appointments are only for certificated teachers who professionally teach in the day-schools,' he explained, 'and this apparently does not apply to you.'

'But I have a diploma for subjects which equalizes my qualifications with those of the professional teacher, I presume. At any rate, sir, I am confident of being able to meet your requirements, especially as I have a distinct liking for the work.'

Again he smiled and asked me to fill in and post to

nim the necessary form of application. The result was that my name was put on the panel and I was able to teach English composition, civics, and the history of English literature at three different institutes. My favourite class was at the Marylebone Evening Institute, where I had charge of about thirty boys of between fourteen and seventeen years of age. They came in bubbling over with devilment and high spirits and my first task was to compose the gymnastic element of the room to the level of serious study. Sometimes, in calling the register, I found that the number of lads present did not square with the answers I had received, which was due to a preconceived plan to call out for 'pals' who were there in spirit but not in the flesh. But they were splendid boys to instruct and responded more readily to friendly persuasion than to any sort of bullying discipline. May they all be flourishing in their manhood state.

When I accepted a job as sub-editor on the *Investors' Guardian*, I knew that my dislike of finance would not keep me there very long. The office was an emporium of company prospectuses and reports and when I was not writing up notes on trade fluctuations I was sent to City offices to report the general company meetings. Here I saw Invested Capital on the march. If the balance sheet showed a high rate of dividend, then the shareholders would beam on and bless the directors accordingly. But a declining rate brought criticism and a call for ruthless economy. The growing number of deaths from consumption in the mines of Arizona might be stated in the annual report, but no one referred to this item. What the shareholders took for granted was that whether their capital was invested in the cotton-mills of Lancashire, in the tin mines of Nigeria, or in the tea plantations of Assam, the toiling masses would daily perform their appointed tasks that annual dividends might arrive as regularly as the seasons. On no occasion did shareholders make inquiries about payments or

labour conditions of the workers. A cold, greedy formality characterized the proceedings and I was heartily glad to escape from the atmosphere. There was no human warmth in this world of finance and I was soon back in the pulsating life of the common people, providing stories for the newspapers.

Happily, though I had now no time to sit on Parnassus in piping vein, I could at least sit and listen to the echoes of its music in the fortnightly readings at the Poetry Bookshop in Devonshire Street. Held in a small barn-like room that without the drapings and furniture would have well served the Cato Street conspirators, but which, in its presentment for poetic renderings, had all the esoteric conditions one could desire. The audience was composed of a faithful band of poetry lovers who sat in virtual darkness to listen to the guest-poet read his own compositions from a recess at the end of the room. Here I heard Ezra Pound, Ernest Rhys, Harold Munro, and a number of other modern poets deliver their enchantments and for an hour open a way of escape from the strain of normal existence. But it was an escape into loftier altitudes of thought and aspiration, a reintroduction to the life-beautiful and to all that stirred the emotions of youth. To the sentimentalist poetry is a soporific, but to the active mind it is challenging in its appeal.

After serenity came the storm, which rapidly blew up when the contending parties of the Hampstead Parliament met at the Central Library to hurl political brick-bats at one another. For a time I was Leader of the Opposition (the Conservatives of course being in power) and often championed Labour claims against the Tory proposals of Mr Claude Mullins and other unprogressive 'ministers.' The standard of debate was high and it even reached Westminster levels when speakers like Sir Patrick Hastings and Captain Euen Wallace came to introduce the 'Order of the Day.'

But there were a lot of old, crusty Conservative

members who attacked the unemployed as work-shy scoundrels on whom the State had no right to spend a single penny. Living in comfortable retirement themselves they exuded selfishness and fear at the merest suggestion of a half-starved child receiving a Government allowance of milk, or of raising the 'dole' to enable family life to take on a human resemblance. The War-time protection they received from the men whom they now despised was of no account; the rates and taxes were now the god of their idolatry and the parrot-cry of 'where is the money coming from?' was heard with painful persistency. How they suffered from the boggy of Bolshevism! Every opposing argument was an importation from Russia and endless invitations were extended to the Labour members to go and 'live under Lenin.' Their only comprehension of 'love of country' was in telling the other man to go and die for it in times of war. To sacrifice for it in times of peace was nothing more than unpatriotic treason. No wonder I was incensed to the point of applying to Fenner Brockway of the I.L.P. for a constituency to fight at the forthcoming general election. The rampant selfishness of affluent old age was bearing distressingly on the young and the poor and I dreamt of attacking it on the floor of the House of Commons. Lack of funds frustrated that ambition but the afterglow still remains to keep alive the emotions that gave it birth.

It can be seen from the foregoing that I had little time to think of taking a wife unto my bosom. Supplying the press with news-stories, writing articles, interviewing people, reporting football, teaching in schools, attending debates, concerts, and anything of cultural interest, I could well say with the poet:

One crowded hour of glorious life,  
Is worth an age without a name;

but between the crowded hours I felt the depressing solitude of living alone. The urge for sex companion-



ship was never stronger than when I returned to the silence of my own room after a hard day's work without the hope of sharing the confidence and comfort of another soul to release the energy of thought and emotion. For promiscuous friendships I had little taste and still observed my youthful principles of treating sex on an honourable basis. But this only intensified my sense of loneliness, for, not being in a financial position to respond to serious affection, I denied myself companionship that otherwise I could have enjoyed. It also happened that in the house where I was staying a jarring note was set up by a couple who paid little compliment to the bliss of married life.

The husband I knew as Horace; and as Horace could boast of an Oxford education it was a sad fate that compelled him to support his wife and child on a small Government wage, and to provide no better accommodation than a single room. Whether the wife rebelled against this indignity or not I cannot say, but the periodical scuffles that took place, when the poor woman was chased crying from the room, indicated that to be 'happy though poor,' was a dictum not easy of application. But Oxford dies hard. Horace had been to Oxford and had *The Times* newspaper delivered every morning, and though he had spent half the night fighting with his wife, he never failed to leave the house without upholding the dignities of the old school tie, an Oxford accent, and the British *Times*, cheerfully waving the last-named to the empty window as he passed down the road.

Thirty can be a dangerous age when you are not fully established in a career. Youth is on the side of the twenties and keeps the heart buoyant and free, but over the boundary one begins to lag a little as if through disappointment with the progress of the journey. I arrived at the middle-mist where the past was bright but the future obscure with uncertainty. Having attained a precarious foothold in journalism, should I try to plod

on or turn aside for less adventure and more security? The love of books and the contemplative life were calling me to quieter pastures and when an opportunity came for me to enter the world of publishing, I forsook the 'riot of Fleet Street' for the more orderly ways of literature. Was I acting wisely or merely tiring a little in the struggle? I wonder.



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